

Conversion and Narrative

Reading and Religious Authority in
Medieval Polemic

Ryan Szpiech



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READING AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY
IN MEDIEVAL POLEMIC

Ryan Szpiech

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*For my parents, Terry and Joyce Szpiech,
with gratitude and love*

E come quei che con lena affannata,
uscito fuor del pelago a la riva
si volge a l'acqua perigliosa e guata,
così l'animo mio, ch'ancor fuggiva,
si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo
che non lasciò già mai persona viva.

[And just as he, who with labored breathing has
escaped from the deep onto the shore, turns to
the perilous waters and gazes, so my mind, which
was still in flight, turned back to look again at
the pass that no living person ever left.]

—DANTE, *Inferno* I, 22–27

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NOTE ON NAMES, TITLES, CITATIONS, AND TRANSLITERATION

This study refers to medieval persons from different linguistic backgrounds, many of whom could be named in multiple ways. For familiar names (Augustine, Muhammad, Maimonides, etc.), a conventional English spelling will be given and any transliteration will be dropped. For less common names, an attempt has been made to use names according to recognizable scholarly convention (Paulus Alvarus, Judah Halevi, etc.), balanced by a sense, wherever possible, of how each name might have been most familiar to those authors (e.g., the Catalan names Ramon Martí, Pau Cristià, and Ramon Llull rather than Raymond Martini, Paul Christiani, and Ramón Lull). For converts with multiple names, both pre- and postconversion names are given in order when possible (e.g., Moses/Petrus Alfonsi, Bodo/Eleazar, Anselm Turmeda/‘Abd Allāh al-Turjumān). Place-names that are common or repeated are generally given in anglicized form (Rome, Cordoba, Aragon, etc.), but lesser known names are given in their local form (Lleida, Girona, Penyafort, etc.). In the interest of economy, I have referenced but not cited text in original languages, except where it is unavailable in a published source. When original Arabic text is transliterated, I have followed the conventions of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, with a few modifications (*j* for *dj*, *q* for *ḳ*, and elimination of all underscoring). For Hebrew, I have followed the *AJS Review* with a few modifications (*ṭ* for *ṭet*, *q* for *qof*). All biblical references are based on the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, the *Novum Testamentum Graecae* (Nestle-Aland 27th ed.), or *Biblia Sacra Vulgata* (5th ed., Stuttgart). Unless noted, all English translations follow the New Revised Standard Translation. All other uncredited translations are my own.

Introduction

Conversion and History

The past is never dead. It is not even past.

—WILLIAM FAULKNER, *Requiem for a Nun*

THE DREAM OF RABBI ABNER

There was once a Jew who, well into his adult life, began to think deeply about the trials of his people. One day, he entered a synagogue and, with lamentation and bitterness in his heart, began to pray, “Lord God, I beg you, have mercy on our trials. What is the cause of your anger and fury against your people, the sheep of your pasture? Why will the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’ Lord, hear now my prayer and my cries, and illuminate your desolate sanctuary. Have mercy on your people Israel.” And with great heaviness of heart, exhausted from the burden he had taken upon himself, this Jew grew tired, fell asleep in the synagogue, and began to dream. In his dream he met a great man who said to him, “Why do you sleep? Understand my words, and pay attention: The Jews are in such long exile because of their insanity and their ignorance, and because they lack a righteous teacher in whom they may know the truth.” When he awoke from his dream, he began to scour the Bible and books of religion and philosophy for explanations to his questions, but he only grew more doubtful and confused, and vowed to remain steadfast in the faith of his forefathers and not to pay heed to the doubts in his heart. Yet his tribulations and doubts persisted, and his dreams did not stop. A few years later, after spending the day fasting, he had another dream in which the same man appeared and scolded him angrily. The man ordered the Jew “to arise from his sleep,” telling him, “You are responsible for the sins of all of the Jews and their children and future generations.” Miraculously, as he said this, the great man made crosses appear all over his clothing. The Jew awoke, and after dreaming this same dream repeatedly over many nights, he finally vowed to convert to Christianity and to write a book in defense of his

new faith.

Such is the story told by the Castilian Jew Abner of Burgos (ca. 1265/70–ca. 1347), known after his conversion as Alfonso of Valladolid or Master Alfonso (*Maestre Alfonso*), in the opening of his lengthy anti-Jewish polemic, *Teacher of Righteousness* (*Moreh Zedek*), composed in Hebrew in the early 1320s. The text, which survives only in a contemporary Castilian translation under the title *Mostrador de justicia*, is one of the longest anti-Jewish works written in the Middle Ages, comparable to the enormous *Dagger of Faith* (*Pugio fidei*) from 1278 by the Dominican Ramon Martí (Raimundus Martinus). Unlike Martí's *Dagger*, however, Abner/Alfonso's *Teacher* is written from a first-person perspective that begins with a narrative account of the author's conversion.

Who was this sorrowful Jew, dreaming of crosses in a synagogue? A variety of sources, including archival documents and polemical treatises written by Jews and Christians, confirm the existence of a real person named Abner of Burgos who did become a Christian around 1320, took the new name Alfonso of Valladolid, and wrote a series of anti-Jewish works in Hebrew, including the *Teacher*. Was Abner/Alfonso, the double-named author of this first-person account, the same man who in the text prayed and dreamed and converted? It seems obvious that the author was also the character in his first-person narrative, and at first blush there is no reason to doubt that this conversion account describes the author's experience. There is, however, virtually no information to be found about the real conversion of the author, Abner/Alfonso himself, beyond what can be gleaned from his autobiographical account. We must assume that it happened as he narrates it.

Or must we? Behind the composition of his book, we might imagine that there is the experience of the real author that led to the actual event of his conversion, which we know must have occurred shortly before the account of it was composed. Are we correct, therefore, in seeing the elements of this conversion narrative as representations, perhaps embellished but accurate nonetheless, of actual events as well? The great historian of Iberian Jewry, Yitzhak Baer, who maintained a lifelong interest in Abner/Alfonso, believed we are. After summarizing the same account given above, he remarks, "Abner wrestled in spirit for some twenty-five years until (shortly before the year 1321) he announced his profession of the Christian faith."¹ Historians like Baer can date the public *announcement* of his new faith and consider it as a historical fact (although since we know of no one else who was there to hear such an announcement and tell of it, even this depends on Abner/Alfonso's own testimony to a good degree), but Abner/Alfonso's feelings before his conversion are more

problematic. We only know that he “wrestled in spirit for some twenty-five years,” as Baer says, because Abner/Alfonso himself tells us he did, and he constructed his story to be read as part of his attack on his former faith. Although one can verify through later evidence external to the text that Abner/Alfonso was a real person who did profess Christianity, the process of that conversion is available only through the account by the author himself written after the fact. Perhaps the author Abner/Alfonso did indeed “wrestle in spirit” (whatever this might mean) just as his character did, but his autobiographical testimony can only tell us about the struggles of his fictional counterpart. As Karl Morrison insists in his study of medieval conversion, one must distinguish between the experience of conversion, the “thing felt,” and the document written about it, the “thing made.”

This book studies the “thing made” to represent conversion in a variety of medieval works that discuss religious belief and identity, in particular polemical works directed against other religions. In exploring the contours of that “thing made,” I consider not only its form and content but also its placement within, and in relation to, other texts. Although my focus is mainly on deliberately constructed accounts like Abner/Alfonso’s, the study includes other sources, such as examples of religious polemic and disputation as well as historiography and exegesis. I focus on medieval Christian texts, principally from the twelfth century to the fifteenth, but also consider the late antique paradigms on which those texts were modeled, and I contextualize the developments in those stories by comparing them to contemporary narratives of conversion to Judaism and Islam as well. While this broad view includes material from across the Mediterranean, as well as from farther north and east, it focuses on the Western Mediterranean as a center around which there circulated competing and complementary currents of belief in the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The central question I aim to address is what place such first-person stories had in the discourse of religious apology and polemic. Although I focus heavily on Christian sources, I ask the same questions of treatises from all three Abrahamic religions: Why did polemical writers tell these stories? What connection did a writer like Abner/Alfonso see between his story and his theological criticism of Judaism? How would a Jewish reader of this Hebrew text understand such a personal narrative? Most important, how did such stories convey meaning *as stories*? In pursuing these questions, this book attempts to provide a new, interdisciplinary perspective on medieval writing about religious dispute by viewing it through the lens of literary studies.

By including examples from such separate historical moments and places of origin, I do not at all mean to blur the essential differences that define them or to suggest an absolute homogeneity of either thought or purpose across languages, religions, or historical periods. I do, however, wish to signal a coherence of understanding and of written form that constituted the backbone of various overlapping or intersecting traditions of representation. Interpreting late medieval scenes such as those embedded within Abner/Alfonso's dreams through the lens of late antique and early medieval depictions of conversion will not only offer a wider historical scope in understanding conversion, but will, I hope, lead us to rethink what we (as postmedieval readers) mean by the term *religious conversion* and to redraw, or at least challenge, the generic boundaries between the archival, doctrinal, and narrative sources that represent it. As these boundaries change, so also the disciplinary boundaries between history, religious studies, and literary criticism might need to be adjusted in accord with new insights.

I have deliberately used Abner/Alfonso's story, a confession embedded within an anti-Jewish treatise, to raise theoretical and conceptual questions about the nature of individual identity and belief, not to provide definitive answers to them, but as a way to adumbrate the premises on which the arguments of this book are based: that there is a fundamental connection between conversion stories and medieval polemical writing, and that even though these stories are patterned on the model of Christian hagiography (saints' Lives), the analysis of conversion narratives found in disputational texts requires a different set of critical tools than conversion accounts in other forms of historical and devotional writing. As I will show, the connection between conversion and polemic is most evident in their shared arguments concerning individual and collective identity, arguments that, in turn, share a fundamentally *narrative* structure. By *narrative*, I mean not merely, in Gerald Prince's definition, "the representation of events or changes in states of affairs," but more specifically H. Porter Abbott's words: "the representation of events, consisting of *story* and *narrative discourse*," in which "story is an *event* or sequence of events (the *action*); and narrative discourse is those events as represented."² By *narrative structure*, I imply the sequence of events as represented in language according to a coherent but not necessarily chronological order and unity, one that unfolds from scene to action to effect and that is enhanced through repetition and retelling. Robert Alter calls this, in the context of biblical prose, the "narrative continuum," which he defines clearly as "a coherent unfolding story in which the meaning of earlier data is progressively, even systematically, revealed or enriched by the addition of

subsequent data.”³

In stressing their shared structure and form, I aim not only to signal the admittedly obvious connection between conversion stories and polemical argument (the very representation of conversion through narrative is, in the Middle Ages, a form of religious apologetic, an aggressive way to define and defend one’s beliefs). Taking this connection as given, this book has three main goals, each tied to the core arguments I defend in the remainder of this introduction. The first goal is to consider the place of conversion narratives in religious dispute, to ask why and how the form of conversion stories serves to express their polemical intentions. In attempting to answer this question, I argue that narrative serves as a fitting vehicle for medieval Christian arguments because both the individual conversion story and the general polemical ideas are expressions of a shared understanding of Christian history.

My second goal is to explore the reasons for the renewed importance of stories of conversion in Christian arguments beginning in the twelfth century. In particular, I hope to show the place of conversion stories among the various aspects of Christian disputational writing that began to change in the twelfth century, aspects that also included an increasing use of philosophy, a new focus on non-Christian Scriptures, and a heightened interest in the original languages of those sources. I argue that conversion stories, as expressions of sacred history, also become a basis for authoritative proof offered in light of this evolving definition of Christian *auctoritas*.

Third, I aim to contextualize the changing importance of conversion accounts in Christian texts by comparing them to a few parallel examples from Jewish and Muslim traditions. In Christian writing, the natural conflation of conversion with apology points to the fundamental narrative structure underlying Christian conceptions of religious identity and difference within the framework of salvation history. The question emerges, in considering contemporary examples from Jewish and Muslim traditions, whether the same structure holds beyond a Christian framework. In comparing Christian, Muslim, and Jewish texts, I argue that narratives of conversion play a more prominent role in Christian polemics than they do in Muslim and Jewish treatises because they more fittingly reflect Christian notions of revelation, salvation, and time.

REREADING MEDIEVAL CONVERSION

The close link between apologetic writing and conversion narrative develops in late antiquity in a unique way in Christianity. The

development of antipagan and anti-Jewish texts from the earliest written documents in Christianity (the New Testament letters of Paul of Tarsus) becomes at the same time a development of the rhetoric of narrating conversion. Starting with this connection allows us to see conversion not, or not only, as a type of experience among believers but as a category of discourse alongside other basic categories of Christian expression such as polemic and, even more broadly, biblical exegesis. As it evolves, writing about conversion does not develop in isolation as an independent sort of “life writing” (or ego document) and even less as a subgenre of historiography. Instead, it constitutes part of the debate about a variety of theological and doctrinal problems in Christian thought, problems that, with few exceptions, give way to defensive and offensive rhetoric as well. Conversion narratives in medieval apologetic sources combine inward-looking apology and outward-looking polemic not through autobiography or historiography, but through what can be better described as a combination of hagiography and heresiography, an allegorization of the life of an individual believer combined with a defensive reflection on the boundaries of acceptable belief. The predominance of heresiological concerns is especially evident in early representations of conversion such as those of Christian apologist Justin Martyr (100–165), in which conversion is merely one concept in the construction of a nascent vocabulary of anti-Judaism. Similarly, as Nock has noted, the description by the ex-pagan convert Arnobius (d. ca. 330) of his “having been led into the paths of truth [*in vias veritatis inductus*]” is couched in a scathing vilification of pagan ideas.⁴ Even the famous narration of the conversion of Augustine of Hippo (354–430) in his *Confessions*, hailed so often as a foundational moment of modern autobiography, can also be understood as part of his larger offensive against Manichaeism, a project evident in most of his key texts from the 390s and culminating a few years after the *Confessions* in his monumental anti-Manichaean treatise *Against Faustus*. In most of the examples that follow, the narrating of conversion points less to individual experience than to community standards of belief.

My reason for giving more attention to Christian narratives and discourse than Jewish and Muslim examples is that conversion and conversion stories become particularly important in Christian treatises after the twelfth century because Christian notions of argumentative authority and proof begin to change at this time. Most medieval conversion stories in Latin polemical texts before the twelfth century rehearse the same themes as earlier biblical and patristic models: the theological replacement of Israel by the Church, the prophetic fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New, and the obdurate rejection of Christ by the “stiff-necked” Jews. The dominant medieval

model of such writing, at least up to the eleventh century, is Augustinian. It closely follows the insights and images of Augustine's intricate exegetical combination of the theological rhetoric of the Pauline Epistles with the narrative depiction of the *character* Saul/Paul in the New Testament book of the Acts of the Apostles. A need to elaborate a new image of textual authority in Christian writing emerges around the twelfth century following a shift in this Augustinian paradigm of conversion. This shift, I believe, resulted from the introduction of extrabiblical sources into traditional disputational and apologetic writing. While numerous scholars have made a similar claim about Christian, and especially anti-Jewish, policy and debate, I approach the same topic of the twelfth-century evolution of Augustinian ideas in terms of both polemical content and the presentation of that content through narratives of conversion. As the campaign against Jews and other non-Christians began, in the late eleventh century and the twelfth century, to blend Augustine's biblically based interpretations with new positions derived from philosophical reason, the representation of conversion shifted in tandem, blending imagery from Acts and Augustine with philosophical arguments derived from non-Scriptural sources. In these twelfth-century reformulations, converts themselves emerge as characters within their narratives, playing the role of mouthpieces for the elaboration and defense of a new, rational apologetic.

The influence of philosophy, however, went beyond the reasons adduced in dispute. Twelfth-century conversion texts do not simply repeat the theological formulas of old but mix philosophical language and reasons into the warp and weft of their changing discourse. Just as the very concept of what constituted an *auctor*—a venerated and credible source cited in authorization of one's own discourse—expanded in the twelfth century to include not merely biblical *testimonia* (citations of well-known verses) but also philosophical authors such as Aristotle and his commentators, so too did other related concepts. Most important, the concept of *auctoritas*—the authority by which proofs were credible—expanded to include the ratiocination of contemporary authors alongside (although never quite equal to) biblical *auctores*. As the supplanting of the synagogue by the church began to be explained not only through exegesis but also through syllogism, conversion accounts began to include the personal testimony of their authors as a new source of *authoritative* proof.

Those conversion narratives appearing at the beginning of longer polemical treatises might thus be compared to the form of the standard medieval prologue. Frequently affixed to the beginning of common school texts from different branches of learning in the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, such prologues (called variously an *accessus* in the

arts, *materia* in legal writing, and *introitus* or *ingressus* in some exegesis) came in a variety of evolving forms but often included some comment on the circumstances of the work's genesis (the life of the poet, the title, the intention, the contents and order, etc.).⁵ The well-known conversion stories of the twelfth century such as those of Judah/Herman of Cologne and Moses/Petrus Alfonsi (which I consider in more detail below) vividly reflect the theological changes taking place within biblical and Augustinian paradigms, above all in their conception of authority. They also share important characteristics with the more recognizable examples of academic prologues, offering the circumstances under which the author came to acquire the authority to speak against his former religion.

Throughout this book, I use the terms *apology* and *apologetic* to refer to writing intended to defend one's ideas or the ideas of one's group, and I use *polemic* and *polemical* to refer to works intended to denounce the ideas of another individual or group. These terms are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, insofar as polemical discourse itself is inherently a form of apologetic, aimed at defining or reinforcing boundaries of group identity against a foil of heterodox difference—and apology always implies a comparative rejection of opposing views—the two terms form an almost indivisible pair. My use of each term in this book aims to highlight the primary mode of the text (offensive or defensive) but does not assume a firm distinction between them.

The transformation in what constituted authoritative proof in twelfth-century Christian polemical output, embodied so lucidly in the conversion narratives produced during this period, only intensified in the thirteenth century, especially within the recently founded Dominican and Franciscan orders. The works produced by such movements—including the claims attributed to the convert Pau Cristià against Jews at the famous Disputation of Barcelona in 1263 and after, the writings of the Dominicans Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (d. 1320) and Ramon Martí (d. after 1284), as well as the Franciscanesque rhetoric of the polymath Ramon Llull—can all be understood as part of this ongoing process of adjustment and growth within traditional concepts of what constitutes authority in polemical argument. The writing of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid (including the conversion narrative with which I began), penned in the first half of the fourteenth century, in the wake of the Dominican projects of the previous century, links the theological debate over authority with the shifting role of personal testimony. The images of conversion recast in the texts of Moses/Petrus Alfonsi in the twelfth century, Ramon Martí in the thirteenth, and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid in the fourteenth appear together in the fifteenth century in the work of the

Castilian convert from Judaism, Solomon Halevi/Pablo de Santa María (d. 1435), and through these writers, the high-medieval changes wrought upon the Augustinian conversion paradigm were internalized and transmitted to the early modern world.

BETWEEN TEXT AND EVENT

Before attempting to answer the questions implicit in this historical trajectory—Why do Christian conversion stories function so well to express polemical arguments, and what role in particular is played by the *narrative* form of such stories?—I must first consider the more basic methodological problem of distinguishing between conversion itself and the stories about conversion.⁶ This question, which bears directly on the definition of my corpus of sources in this study and on the justification for comparing them across historical and geographical boundaries, brings me back to the example with which I began, that of Abner/Alfonso. Although he was a historical person, we know virtually nothing of his change of religion except what he records in his testimony. Is his narrative fact or fiction? The question is not one of sources but of epistemology: What would a *factual* conversion account look like? (What, indeed, are conversion's facts?) What does it mean to say a conversion “happened” at a certain moment? Or that a conversion never “happens” at any one moment? Can we say Abner/Alfonso converted at the moment he changed his mind about which religion to follow, perhaps sometime around 1317 or 1318? Or at the moment he publicly declared his new faith and was baptized (what Karl Morrison calls a “formal conversion”), an event that occurred a few years later, according to his narrative in the *Teacher*?. Or was it upon his change of name and integration into a new Christian community in Valladolid (what Richard Bulliet calls, in an Islamic context, “social conversion”)?⁷ How can we distinguish between the inner and the outer manifestations of conversion and, more important, decide on what grounds to give precedence to one over the other? Should we resist, as Morrison and Lewis Rambo counsel, locating conversion at any single moment, but instead see it as a process of transformation? In this approach, which favors an empathetic view of conversion as essentially an interior process of change, one could situate the beginning of Abner/Alfonso's conversion in 1295, the moment that led to his first doubts about his religion. It was then, some twenty-five years prior to his first dream events, when he says he heard of the failed messianic movements among the Jewish communities of Ávila and Ayllón, an experience to which he likens the dream vision of crosses related in his account.

Understood in this way, Abner/Alfonso's narrative seems to portray conversion as a process rather than a single event. Rather than emphasizing a sudden paroxysm of physical blindness and moment of insight, such as that told of Saul "becoming" Paul on the road to Damascus (as related in the New Testament book of Acts), Abner/Alfonso's description stresses the long and arduous process of his transformation, including his resistance to the sudden challenge of his dream and his efforts to remain steadfast in the face of these external blows to his ancestral faith. His story of conversion is of another sort than this Pauline paradigm, especially in its depiction of the circularity of his doubt and faith and the gradual erosion of erstwhile belief. In stressing the slowness of his process, Abner/Alfonso creates a space within his old religion for his new one rather than replacing it entirely at one stroke. He wears away his old faith with the slow, eroding drip of doubt rather than eliminating it in a single blast of will.

This dilatory, protracted transformation is a *topos* of representation, a product of the exigencies of narrative drama rather than spiritual doubt. Let us consider, by way of contrast, the story of another conversion, told at about the same time that Abner/Alfonso publicly announced his conversion to Christianity and moved from Burgos to Valladolid, the story of a man from Aragon, Bernat Nadal, who took a trip to North Africa and decided to convert to Islam. This story is found in a letter addressed to the vicar of Tortosa about the petition of Sybil, Bernat's "poor and miserable wife," for financial assistance:

A case came before us on behalf of Sybil, the poor and miserable wife of Bernat Nadal, in which...it happened that the said Bernat was traveling in the regions of Bijāya (Bougie) and the Barbary [coast] when, led by a diabolic spirit, he chose the sect of Muhammad, denying the name of the Lord. After which, the father of the said Bernat, finding this out, entering those said regions and finding his said...son, brought him back to the city of Tortosa with him and brought him to the Bishop of Tortosa who corrected and reconciled the said Bernat and gave him penance for his crime. And after the death of the father of said Bernat, you, the fiscal procurator [treasurer], claimed from the said Bernat on account of what happened, a quantity of money belonging to said Bernat on account of inheritance...asserting that both the said quantity and also the other property of said Bernat pertained to our court on account of his above-mentioned crime. Therefore, it is claimed that said Bernat [now] lives in a far-away place, his wife having been abandoned without any provision with a multitude of children. On account of which, it was humbly pleaded before us on behalf of the said Sybil that in consideration of piety and giving alms for the upbringing and education of her children we deign to make the

Unlike Abner/Alfonso's story, this account was not written by the convert himself but was recorded by an anonymous notary for the Crown of Aragon. Despite its detail, it was not constructed with any doctrinal point in mind, but only to record the facts of the case for legal purposes. Understanding his conversion as a process, we might see that a narrative about Bernat's conversion to Islam arises, seemingly spontaneously, through the reconstruction of the circumstances of the case. Bernat "flees," physically and spiritually, from his Christian home, and is brought back to the fold, at least physically, only through the intervention of his father. In the narrative of the case, however, there is still virtually no information about Bernat's spiritual experience beyond mention of the simple fact that he changed religion. Bernat's adoption of Islam is, in fact, only a preliminary detail to the real story, that of his return to Tortosa, subsequent harassment by the local vicar, and final flight (to North Africa and, it might be presumed, to his new faith).

Did Bernat change his mind twice about his true beliefs? The text tells us nothing. The circumstances of his decision to become Muslim are absent from the frame of the narrative. Certainly, a formal change of religion could indicate a conversion of belief, but we do not know if Bernat actually underwent any real transformation at all. Perhaps he did not care what religion he was made to profess, and "chose the sect of Muhammad" only as a convenience or to facilitate marriage with a local girl he met on his travels, like the Galician poet Garci Ferrandes de Jerena later in the fourteenth century, who, according to the *Cancionero de Baena*, converted to Islam for love of a Muslim *jongleuresse* and then followed her to Granada.⁹ In Bernat's case, one could ask, Why was he traveling? Perhaps Bernat actually did undergo a profound transformation in which he came to embrace Islam as the true religion, and left his infidel family behind only with sadness and regret. Such speculations are possible—indeed, one has no reason to doubt that Bernat's experience was any less dramatic than Abner/Alfonso's—but they are ultimately fruitless, because the only significance of his change of religion in the text is its impact on his family and its bearing on the legal decision to return to the wife the money and property confiscated in Tortosa. Bernat's personal experience or lack thereof finds no place in the official letter.

The fragmentary representation of Bernat's move from Christianity to Islam in this archival record is radically different from the longer account of Abner/Alfonso's move from Judaism to Christianity in the *Teacher*. The most significant difference between these two texts, beyond the enormous differences of perspective

(third-person versus first-person narrative) and form (polemical treatise versus royal register), lies in the lack of concern by the Aragonese scribe with Bernat's *experience* of religious conversion, what Wayne Proudfoot calls, in his summary of Schleiermacher's *On Religion*, "an experiential moment irreducible to either science or morality, belief or conduct."¹⁰ His movement between religions is as matter-of-fact as his physical movement between Tortosa and North Africa, neither meriting a detailed description. In their textual forms, which are the only accounts we possess, Bernat's conversion seems instantaneous, while Abner/Alfonso's seems just the opposite. Our understanding of his conversion either as an event or as a process depends appreciably on the nature of the source in which it is found and our expectations as readers in approaching it.

Despite the differences between them, historians classify both accounts as documents about conversion.¹¹ These two types of representation of religious change—the protracted narrative of doubt and suffering and the matter-of-fact allusion in archival sources—are, moreover, not the only examples of religious change lumped together under this single rubric. To these one can add an even more succinct anecdote, that of a "forced" conversion in Abner/Alfonso's hometown of Burgos. The municipal archive contains a document issued in 1481 by Queen Isabel of Castile outlawing the forced baptism of Muslim children. The brief text narrates the case of an unnamed "moor of very tender age [*un moro de muy tyerna hedad*]" who was "turned Christian" by the chief magistrate (*Alcalde mayor*) of the city in a forced conversion that was "against the will of his father and mother [*tornaron cristiano contra su voluntad de su padre e madre*]." No other information about the case was given, and the young Muslim has no lasting historical identity beyond this phrase included in a legal document. Even so—despite the dearth of information about the boy, his personal experience, his reaction, or the final outcome of the case—his story is also deemed one of "conversion, more or less forced." Drawing from archival sources, one might add thousands of such accounts.¹²

I have chosen these two archival examples because of their circumstantial intersection with Abner/Alfonso's narrative. Bernat Nadal's profession of Islam occurred within a few years of Abner/Alfonso's public turn to Christianity, and the young Muslim's forced adoption of Christianity took place more than a century later in Burgos, Abner/Alfonso's home city. Despite their commonalities, however, all of these examples bespeak vastly different events in very different written forms, and yet all three are promiscuously treated as writings relating to the nebulous topic of conversion. A common denominator of these three cases is their mention of religious change,

yet in each case this implies something dramatically different: a heartfelt change of belief and understanding, an (apparently willful) change in social identity, and an imposed change in religious affiliation, respectively. The process, experience, impact, and meaning of that religious change are very disparate in each source, and yet all have been tacitly conflated and incorporated into a single, totalizing conceptual historiography.

The implicit connection or differentiation among these cases depends not only on epistemology but on terminology as well, on how one defines the word *conversion* itself. Is conversion a formal change of religion? A sacrament or ceremony? An experience of sudden change or a deliberate action? An enduring process of slow renewal and rebirth? Is conversion all of these things, or must it be at least one of them? Is it performed, and if so, does it have to be witnessed? Is it an expression of individual human agency, or the subjugation of that agency to larger social norms and rituals? To begin to answer these questions, even to distinguish between a formal change of affiliation and a sincere change of feeling, requires a series of decisions about the nature and meaning of both religious experience and identity. Any such decisions will be made within the context of a long history of assertions about the nature of conversion. While I specifically examine medieval characterizations of conversion in greater detail below, the scholarly path leading back to such primary evidence is not a smooth one. It is, rather, littered with the conceptual scaffolding of a century of critical inquiry into the nature of conversion, and little sense can be made of the documents themselves before those concepts are put in order, connected, and contextualized.

Traditional scholarly approaches tend to place different conceptions of conversion, and with them different conceptions of experience and identity, in a hierarchical relation to one another.¹³ The father of the modern study of conversion, William James, for example, famously understands conversion from a psychological perspective as an experience of change and renewal, exemplified by those he calls the “twice born.” His definition of conversion has had a profound impact on subsequent discussions of the subject and uses of the word: conversion is “the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy [*sic*], in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.” This focus on the restoration of the “divided self”—the modern, psychological equivalent of what Gerald Peters calls the Platonic and Christian “reorientation of the sick soul”¹⁴—accompanied a criticism of interpretations that gave equal attention to the social and institutional aspects of religion, in which James explicitly states that his focus is

“not ritual acts...[but] personal religion pure and simple.”¹⁵ The classicist A. D. Nock, following James very closely in his study of conversion in the ancient and early Christian world, takes this hierarchy between the personal and the ritual one step further and denies that other phenomena are even worthy of the name of conversion, constituting instead what can be called “adhesion, in contradistinction to conversion.”¹⁶ An inverse hierarchization has taken place in the study of conversion by sociologists and, to a lesser degree, anthropologists, primarily on the basis of Max Weber’s foundational formulation. In contrast to Émile Durkheim, who unexpectedly characterizes conversion less in social than in personal terms drawn in part from James, Weber understood conversion according to the terms of his theory of religious rationalization, a process that he saw as more advanced in “World Religions” such as Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, than in “primitive” religions.¹⁷ His distinction between “traditional” and world religions, especially concerning their use of prophecy, associates the psychological elements of conversion with the unsystematic primitivism of traditional societies.¹⁸ Building on such foundations, Peter Berger characterizes conversion as a change of the individual in relation to social norms: “The individual who wishes to convert, and (more importantly) to ‘stay converted,’ must engineer his social life in accordance with this purpose.... [M]igration between religious worlds implies migration between their respective plausibility structures.”¹⁹ Recent anthropological studies of conversion have generally recognized the need to “to strike a balance between the two extremes of intellectualist voluntarism and structural determinism.”²⁰ Even so, many treat interior, subjective models of conversion in the school of James and Nock as culturally biased representations that fail to adequately convey the influence of social context. Clifford Geertz affirms that too many definitions “glide past that which we most want to know: by what means, what social and cultural processes, are these movements toward skepticism, political enthusiasm, conversion...or whatever taking place? What new forms of architecture are housing these accumulating changes of heart?”²¹

Central to the anthropological treatment of conversion has been the question of what is commonly called agency. In the work of Peter Stromberg, Talal Asad, and Webb Keane, among other anthropologists, the discussion of agency in the context of conversion reaches a much more nuanced level of sophistication, especially in connection with the use of language. Both Keane and Asad have also offered powerful critiques of the modern notions of agency, selfhood, and intentionality and the authenticity implied by these as they relate to the phenomenon of conversion.²² Nevertheless, apart from these

important interventions, many anthropological approaches, even those aiming to find a middle way between subjective and social forces, still tend to treat agency as a stable, analytical category and view any private or inner experience of religion as derived from or dependent on more essential social realities.

Many scholarly discussions of conversion, whatever their basis, find themselves hamstrung, or at least hampered, by these fundamental rifts between objective and subjective methodologies or between psychological and sociological foci.²³ Devin DeWeese succinctly states the problem in his study of narratives of conversion to Islam in central Asia: “‘Conversion’ is inevitably a process of such considerable psychological and social complexity that even a thorough reconstruction of the historical setting and events that occurred, and even a precise description of ‘what happened’ could not convey the *significance* of the conversion understood and felt, religiously, by the adherents of the new faith and their communal heirs.”²⁴ The fact that *conversion* can point equally to internal conviction and external affiliation indicates that any questions one asks about its meaning come with an initial hermeneutic burden that must necessarily begin by defining the relationship between subjective and objective meaning, on the one hand, and individual and collective experience on the other. Thus what can be said about conversion in the fields of theology, psychology, anthropology, and sociology is necessarily different and necessarily incomplete. When we approach the question of conversion historically, any failure to address such epistemological incommensurability impoverishes our thinking and conceals unspoken prejudices about the nature of faith and identity. To employ the word *conversion* in scholarship, like the words *identity* and *agency*, already presumes a methodology and a worldview.²⁵

As Karl Morrison has argued, “the classical tradition of the West displays not one kind of conversion but an ill-matched repertory of such patterns, each having a distinctive history,” and as a result, “it is a confusion of categories to use the word *conversion* as though it were an instrument of critical analysis, equally appropriate to any culture or religion.”²⁶ I must take Morrison’s insights as my starting point for considering such disparate examples of religious change, acknowledging from the outset that there can be no “general morphology of conversion, applicable to conversion as a universal human experience.”²⁷ As my three short examples make manifest, however, I must also stress that there can be no such specific morphology even within the sources from the same historical moment or the same geographic location. Rather, I must begin by conceding that conversion itself is a placeholder for other protean concepts and paradigms that explain and qualify change of religion in different

ways without ever exhaustively defining it. (Such indeterminacy is, to be sure, an epistemological irony for a concept that for many is premised on notions of certain change and firm distinction.) As a result, it is impossible to use the term *conversion* meaningfully without further qualification, and even with such qualification one must grant that any use of the term itself is imprecise and can refer only very loosely to a range of possible meanings, all of which are never present together. *Conversion* is a collective representation that can be used for convenience but whose full range of significance is perpetually deferred and never definitively grasped.

BETWEEN A HERMENEUTICS OF FAITH AND A HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION

And yet, conversion leaves a trace. In each of its “ill-matched” shapes, it implies a change, a distinction between two things: one religion and another, one culture and another, one practice and another, one understanding and another, one time and another, even one self and another. As a marker of change, it is a marker of otherness, a borderline that implies both an identity and a difference, a site, as Steven Kruger notes in his Derridean reading of conversion texts, of both the “conjuring up” and “conjuring away” of the old self.²⁸ Thus, Morrison’s caveat, although appropriate, is not entirely satisfying, because even as it frees us from trying to generalize across sources and methods, it does not address the persistent duality within its semantic core across its definitions in which conversion is not simply an affirmation of faith but is also a denial of difference. At the same time, Morrison, I believe, also glosses over the problem of representing this duality when he sets out to distinguish between the “thing felt” and the “thing made,” affirming “that the experience of conversion is quite different from what is called conversion in texts, that scholars cannot penetrate to experience through texts, that what we can actually study is a document, a written composition, and whatever kinds of understanding it may manifest.”²⁹ Despite the insistence that conversion “is a metaphor,” the survival within his thinking of that “thing felt” as prior to any representation of it reinscribes an imagined, sacrosanct single “experience” of faith as the primary origin of conversion. “The experience of conversion,” he laments repeatedly, “is lost.”³⁰ Yet this regret over our inability to “penetrate to experience” tacitly assumes the priority of that experience as conversion’s true meaning, a single, transcendental signified outside the web of any partial and deferred signification. Morrison’s attention to the text itself rather than the reality it claims

to depict assumes an original, albeit inaccessible priority of the “thing felt” over the “thing made.” It sees the latter simply as, *faute de mieux*, the only available object of analysis—the last, best outpost of understanding beyond which we cannot proceed despite our will to do so. In this way, it still depends on the projection of a single, stable meaning within the empty cipher of *conversion*. It is my contention that *any* such model of conversion that establishes this hierarchy of significance—whether the subjective above the social, or the inner above the outer, or the “feeling” above the “representation”—assigns a core meaning (however ill-defined) to the concept of conversion as first of all an individual spiritual experience. More problematically, it also gives this assignation epistemological precedence over any other representation.

Such hierarchies affect any attempt to separate and analyze conversion tales apart from individual experience in the world. This implicit faith in an original, “real” conversion behind the text and the impulse to penetrate through the fog of the narrative to an imagined reality has up until recently permeated the historiography of medieval religious identity and is still very much alive within it, leading to numerous ill-founded debates and assertions about the facticity of our sources. Perhaps the most significant (and certainly the most voluminously treated) is the recurrent question regarding the historicity of Augustine’s conversion in book 8 of the *Confessions*.³¹ Against the tradition of seeing Augustine’s account in literary rather than historical terms, those in favor of a historical reading insist, in the words of one recent critic, “that the *Confessions* may be approached as a source of historical facts.”³² A similar debate has roiled around the historicity of the twelfth-century conversion account by Judah/Herman of Cologne, *Little Work on His Conversion* (*Opusculum de Conversione sua*, a title assigned by the modern editor, Gerlinde Niemeyer), leading Jeremy Cohen to affirm that the narrative “can in fact serve as the basis for a worthwhile appraisal of Hermann’s apostasy.... [T]he *Opusculum* does reveal signs of Hermann the individual *behind* the stereotypes in style and in plot.”³³ Nock made similar assertions about the book of Acts, remarking about its numerous conversion stories, “There can be no doubt that the account as a whole gives us a faithful picture of the way in which things happened.”³⁴ This insistence on what lies behind the work approaches its story as an obstacle to reality, a screen we must penetrate in order to understand its meaning.

I believe that this pervasive imperative to aim beyond the text, just like the deflated acceptance of it as cut off from a plenitude that is lost, not only relies on a historiographical illusion. It also succumbs to an implicitly *pietistic* understanding of conversion (and apostasy), one

that mimics the ascendant, teleological imperative dramatized within the text itself. It does so by assuming a transcendental image of conversion as a climactic event in the salvation of the protagonist, a singular and revelatory moment in the individual movement toward God. Any verbal or pictorial representation of that original theophany must necessarily be taken as secondary and derivative, a faint reflection of an original and private splendor. This inherently Neoplatonic view, describing identity in eminently modern terms through, in Charles Taylor's words, "the language of inwardness," uncritically conflates real converts with the protagonists of conversion narratives they sometimes (but by no means always) inspired.³⁵ Even more problematically, it assumes that the convert, as a kind of postmedieval "sovereign self," is defined by some prelinguistic, unmediated fullness of experience that is necessarily superior to any subsequent depiction in symbol or language. But it nonetheless relies on that inferior textual portrayal as a faithful, if fragmented, guide leading us back to that presymbolic transcendental totality. Such a pertinacious and tangled "hermeneutics of faith," to adapt the early terminology of Paul Ricoeur, artificially reduces conversion to a singularity, a true moment that is paradoxically both beyond comprehension and representation and at the same time is a *datum* to be tracked, charted, collated, summarized. Such a reading of faith, which easily lends itself to a matter-of-fact historiographical reading of conversion as a discrete event in historical time, internalizes the terms and hierarchies of hagiography without pausing to consider the legendary story behind the saint.³⁶

Against this view, I propose to approach the conversion narrative, in the heuristic phrase of Jack Miles in his literary reading of the Bible, "like a stained-glass window," a "thing made" to be sure, but one that "exists essentially not to be seen through but to be looked at."³⁷ This image of an illuminated window scene is particularly fitting in its fusion of the rendered image, itself a stylized rendition meant to depict past events, with the illuminating light of context and the interpretive horizon of the viewer. Pushing this beyond its immediate aesthetic sense requires us to look at conversion narratives in medieval polemics not only for their form and construction, but even more for their symbolic function and ideological role within their local context. I aim, then, not only to look *at* the text (rather than *through* it), but more important, to look *around* it, to ask why it was made and why it was placed in its context. The metaphor can be extended in another way as well: like a stained-glass image, these conversion narratives fuse the depiction colored by tradition with the real light of historical context. In this fusion, neither the representation nor the reality can stand apart from the other: even as

the former remains dark without the latter, so the latter cannot pass through the former without taking on its coloring. By seeing the story's details as products of a specific social, religious, and ideological context rather than as fragments of an individual biography or a timeless epiphany, we can move away from the trammels of a pietistic (and largely postmedieval, Reformationist) reading without calling into question the powerful signifying potential of the narrative itself. As Jean-Claude Schmitt insists, if somewhat too cautiously, Judah/Herman's story can only be approached as "*truth and fiction*" without either realm claiming precedence over the other. This observation can be fruitfully extended to other medieval polemical works and conversion narratives as well.³⁸

Although the conversion accounts I consider in this study are those associated with, affixed to, or embedded within polemical writing, my critical trajectory here must follow that already forged by the study of conversion in hagiographic studies. Long mimicking the hagiographical biography itself in focusing on a central, beatific image of the individual saint, criticism of hagiography has, in the past few decades, shifted its focus away from the saint to his or her social context, and this shift has affected the approach toward the hagiographical text itself. As Felice Lifshitz explains, scholars no longer see "'legendary accretions' as dross to be sifted and cleared away" but instead have tended "to move away from bobbing for data to reconstructing mentalities and, consequently, to move from searching for the original version of each particular saint's biography to studying all extant versions, each in its particular compositional context."³⁹ As they have continued to develop, hagiographic studies have moved even further away from the purported events of a saint's life toward a concept of sanctity in which hagiography played an ongoing exemplary role. In undergoing its own linguistic turn, scholarship of hagiography has come to consider the saint's Life as a constructed text rather than an imperfect rendering, and even to see it as the locus at which sanctity is made, preserved, and rehearsed, both individually and socially. As Cynthia Hahn states, "A meticulously composed construction, the saint's Life not only 'makes the saint,' but ideally in some sense *is* the saint."⁴⁰

Taking my cue from this shift in focus in hagiography, my view is directed at the mechanism by which conversion narratives, through a commanding and multifarious discourse that might be compared to the boasting aretalogies (legends of gods' miracles) of ancient Greece and Egypt, both *make* the convert and *are* the convert. This approach could conceivably be followed across a broad canvas of stories, including tales of Marían miracles, historiographical chronicles, and stories embedded within saints' Lives themselves (which is by far the

most abundant material about medieval conversion, outside of archival notices). Obvious candidates for analysis might include the abundant tales found in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Who can resist the famous story of King Edwin and the sparrow?), vernacular texts such as Aelfric's *Lives of Saints*, or even accounts of mass conversion in Old Norse sagas or Old English poems such as *Andreas* (in which Saint Andrew undertakes an arduous sea journey to rescue Saint Matthew from the clutches of the cannibalistic Mermedonians, converting them all in the process). From a later period, many stories could be drawn from the immensely popular *Golden Legend* (*Legenda Aurea*) of Jacobus de Voragine (d. 1298), a work surviving in many hundreds of manuscripts and, among *incunabula*, published more often than the Bible.⁴¹

Despite the wealth of material offered by many such sources, too abundant to concert together in any meaningful way, my purview is more modest, taking in mainly those narratives found in or associated with explicitly polemical and interconfessional apologetic writing.⁴² Such examples are explicitly learned and theological (rather than pietistic, devotional, or popular), and in this sense they can be sharply distinguished from the emotive appeal of hagiography and also from the popular zeal of Marían legends. Constructed in imitation of Hebrew Bible prophetic callings (such as Jeremiah 1:4–13 and Ezekiel 1:1–3), they speak in first-person voices with a peremptory, didactic authority. Their protagonists are decidedly all male, and they can thus be distinguished from the hagiographic glorification of weakness through asceticism and also the depiction (in Marían legends, host-desecration accounts, and accusations of ritual murder) of the perverse deviance of men in contrast to the affective, pliant tractability (and convertibility) of women and children.⁴³ Rather than constructing an ideal of sanctity or piety, these versions enact the double function of reassigning to nontraditional textual sources, both philosophical and Scriptural, a new authoritative value, and of empowering the purported convert/author to wield such sources legitimately. Parallel with but separate from the conceptual matrix of hagiography, polemical conversion narratives work to construct an image of *auctoritas*—understood as both authority and, more problematically, authorship—through the symbolic testimony of the convert. Rather than contributing to a collective understanding of sanctity, these fictions construct an image of textuality, a shared corpus of *auctoritates* (trusted proof texts) that are, by definition, both authoritative and authentic.

To look *at* and *around* the text as a text rather than to imagine looking *through* it to conversion's lost truth requires us first of all to abandon the affective internal moment of conversion in its

transcendental isolation—and with it the isolated and afflicted body or the imagined autonomous self and its emotions—and instead see this moment as flanked by its “before” and its “after,” as both text but also context. While this approach has led to important insights in working with actual imagery and illumination, it has proved harder to sustain in relation to formulaic treatises, which are very often unaccompanied by images.⁴⁴ While most of the texts I examine are of this sort—devoid of images or pictorial embellishment of any kind—part of my strategy in moving my analysis away from a biographical or historiographical reading is to view the stories as if they were dramatizations that possess the unity and simultaneity of narratives conveyed in images.

I recognize that this must, however, go beyond affirming that conversion is a process rather than a peripety (dramatic reversal, what Aristotle calls *peripeteia*)—an assertion that is still based on an experientially framed, theologically derived model. It must also approach conversion as inherently and originally a representation of that alleged process, a prospective rather than retrospective narrative whose meaning *precedes* that of its subject. Paula Fredriksen already alluded to this reversal of signifying processes more than twenty-five years ago in her comparison of Paul and Augustine: “To see a content-filled moment of conversion is to have constructed a narrative whereby that moment emerges retrospectively as the origin of (and justification for) one’s present.... [T]he convert thus sees the subsequent events of his life in light of his conversion; but, *à l’inverse*, his description of his conversion should be read in light of these subsequent events.”⁴⁵ The final step in this inversion must involve a reversal of the relationship between event and text, but also a distinction between the event posited in the story and the event of real experience that may or may not have occurred before it. In expanding Fredriksen’s insights to include the later renditions based on the models of Paul and Augustine, I approach the “thing felt,” in other words, as itself a product of the “thing made,” leaving any real experience outside the text and its web of signification to be called by yet another name, one that need not detain us here. If we insist on looking through the window of representation, behind it we see not the real world of real events but the world interpreted (not apprehended objectively, of course) by the representing mind and feeling heart, a sort of reflection back of the very window we sought to dispense with. To distinguish between the “thing felt” and the “thing made” is not to separate reality from representation but merely to separate one level of representation from another. Accepting this, spiritual conversion in medieval sources thus becomes, in Geoffrey Harpham’s apt phrase, “simply...a strong form of reading.”⁴⁶ In taking

this view, I aim both to dissolve the hierarchy that preserves the event as behind and before the text and to shift the locus of conversion's meaning partly onto the dramatization within the work itself. Reading conversion as a narrative dismantles the hierarchy that posits the interior experience as necessarily prior, both temporally and ontologically, to its exterior manifestation. Like the saint's *vita*, the polemical conversion narrative literally *is* the convert.⁴⁷

Fredriksen's model, however, also urges us as readers to do more than simply replace an implicit "hermeneutics of faith" with a demystifying "hermeneutics of suspicion" in which conversion becomes "just a text" and no more. Real people really did change religion for concrete social and spiritual reasons, and the archival evidence for such real conversion is immeasurably more abundant than what I am here calling *conversion narratives*. Moreover, the occasional representations of such changes in words and images did affect such real actions. In my analysis, I will pause to consider a few examples of the intersection of the symbolic action of imagined conversion with the outside world of physical action, such as the missionary and pastoral strategies of Dominican friars in the mid-thirteenth century, including both writing and forced sermonizing to Jews and Muslims, and the forced conversions that followed in the wake of the anti-Jewish riots that swept across the Iberian Peninsula in the summer of 1391. In focusing on such intersections, however, I am concerned above all with the impact that the presentation of conversion in one context had on subsequent disputational writing. For this reason, I largely prescind from considering the abundant archival sources such as those documenting the case of Bernat and the "moor of very tender age"—although these too, one must insist, are no less represented than longer fictions—or the many legendary conversions built into saints' Lives.

In the chapters that follow, I develop the argument that medieval polemical conversion narratives, especially in Christian treatises, can be seen as a form of learned discourse dedicated specifically to the allegorical expression of a theological vision of soteriological and ecclesiastical history, of "salvation history" or *Heilsgeschichte*. The convert-protagonist, when not imagined as a stand-in for an extratextual, real converted person, emerges as what the formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin calls a *chronotope*, a narratological device for delineating time through physical or spatial terms. (Recognizable examples cited by Bakhtin and his followers include the chivalric romance in *Don Quixote*, Proust's Combray and Paris, the vertical gyres of Dante's Hell and Paradise, and Joyce's map of Dublin.) As "the primary means for materializing time in space,"⁴⁸ the convert-as-*chronotope* embodies and reflects the entirety of salvation time, the

before-and-after of figural Christian thought, the linear imperative of Christian triumphalism, and also, as we will see, Islamic historical abrogation and the closure of prophecy. Rather than expressions of a mystical or devotional imagination or the purely fabricated elements of fiction, the conversion and the convert of polemical writing are manifestations, within a narrative form, of both the communal sense of the fissure between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and the relation between past and present according to a historical model of prophecy and revelation. They constitute, in Peter Brown's words, "microcosmic re-enactments, in one's own region, of a universal order."⁴⁹

Considering how this is so will entail shifting my sense away from the convert's original "thing felt" to the community's "process imagined" (without linking these in a fixed hierarchy of authenticity). In particular, this will involve looking at the *narrative* form of conversion stories. Reading conversion according to its narrative form will, I think, allow me to overcome the traditional dichotomy between subjective and objective paradigms of conversion by integrating both into a symbiotic network of text and action. As Miri Rubin reminds us in her penetrating study of host-desecration tales and anti-Jewish violence, "Narrative has a mimetic function: narrative prefigures and refigures action. Narratives which give sense to violence are encoded within local frames of reference."⁵⁰ A focus on narrative undermines the implicit dichotomy between individual and collective experience, providing a way to approach the representation of conversion as a shared locus of meaning in itself without denying or downplaying the concrete, extratextual impact of that meaning both for individual devotional practice and for the collective understanding. Thus to see conversion narratives as "a venture in poetics" in which "there is little to distinguish a fictive reconstruction of an actual event from the fictional invention of one that never happened" in no way mitigates their concrete impact on the level of interpretation, understanding, and practice.⁵¹ Narration, by uniting past and present, event and representation, within a dialectical web of mutual dependence, is not only itself constitutive of the very concept of conversion, but is also the key to its interpretation in terms that go beyond the text's theological hierarchy without denying its pietistic and polemical impact.⁵²

In proposing this narrative approach, my study departs from previous treatments of conversion in three critical ways. First, as I have already outlined, I underscore the essentially social, ideological function of conversion narratives as expressions of apologetic rather than devotional or psychological meaning, communal portrayal rather than vestiges of individual experience. By this I do not mean to consider conversion simply in social terms as a mass movement; it

should be clear that my project interacts little with the work of historians charting the spread of religion as a historical process (Christianization or Islamization).⁵³ It involves an approach distinct from the abundant literature treating early modern spiritual autobiographies and also constitutes a departure from the perspective developed in the wake of the recent affective turn in the study of devotional and hagiographic material.⁵⁴ I approach conversion narratives as primarily intellectual, not affective, constructions.⁵⁵

A second departure of my reading entails a consideration of the distinct role played by narrative in expressing this connection between conversion and authority, or what Robert Bellah calls “the dialectic of conversion and covenant.”⁵⁶ In the medieval recapitulation of the Augustinian paradigm, the typological structure of prefiguration and fulfillment allowed the convert’s past story to become part of his expertise in understanding. The more authentic his former infidelity and error, the more pronounced (and pronounceable) became his transformation. His argumentative authority was all the greater because of his former alterity. While Steven Kruger has offered a powerful affective reading of this duality in terms of *embodiment* and the crucial conceptual axis of corporality in Christian-Jewish conflict, I follow this dichotomy along a separate textual track according to the form of the *emplotment* of change in both individual experience and communal history, one that considers, in Hayden White’s terms, “a structure of relationships by which the events contained in the account are endowed with a meaning by being identified as parts of an integrated whole.”⁵⁷ This narratological emphasis on conversion’s duality as both an embracing and a rejecting allows me to weave together its formal doctrinal and narrative elements, which both rely on this double movement of before and after, concealment and revelation. The convert’s narrative enacts an implicit gesture of power that can be either directed within the life of the convert himself—an exclusion of the old self by the new—or waged in social terms of the convert’s former coreligionists by his new community.⁵⁸ By looking at the representation of conversion not as a distant reflection of a plenitude of grace but as a constructed articulation of identity and difference, I stress also its unremitting duality as both a positive affirmation and a negative denial, both theological apology and social polemic.

The third departure of this study from prior investigations of conversion narratives entails a comparison of Christian conversion paradigms with the depiction of conversion within the apologetic works of Jewish and Muslim writers. I begin with the assumption that conversion does not signify a one-sided concept, but instead that every conversion implies also some sort of apostasy, that every finding of

faith implies the abandoning of another structure of thought or belief.⁵⁹ This Janus nature is reflected in the semantic range of biblical words for conversion (Heb. *shuv*, “to return,” and its cognates, Gk. *strephō* and Lat. *verto*, “to turn,” and their derivatives), in which every “re-turn to” God is simultaneously a “turn away” from sin; every positive affirmation implies at the same moment a negative denial. In all three terms, there is a multiple semantic meaning of both “returning” to God (as in Ezekiel 14:6, “Repent and turn away from your idols”—*shuvu ve-hashivu*, lit. “return [intransitive, i.e., *turn back*] and return [transitive, i.e., *yourselves*]”), as well as the obverse meaning of backsliding, to “*turn back* again to those weak and beggarly elemental spirits” (Galatians 4:9), as “a dog *turns back* to its own vomit and the sow is washed only to wallow in the mud” (2 Peter 2:22, Proverbs 26:11).⁶⁰ Conversion cannot be thought of apart from reversion; a version from sin cannot be posited without rejecting perversion and subversion of the law. As Augustine remarks in the *Confessions*, playing with this double sense, “*Quia indeaversi sumus, perversi sumus. Revertamur iam, domine, ut non evertamur*” (*Confessions* 4.16.31/1:45), which Wills translates as “Aversion from that good is perversion, so give us conversion to it, lest our fortunes be inverted.”⁶¹ Conversion, especially in the religiously pluralistic context of the later medieval Mediterranean, is never simply the turning *to* one thing but also always implies a turning *from* another. Both textually and historically, every new convert is posited and understood in dialogue with its former self. To paraphrase Walter Benjamin in the terms of this study, there is no document of conversion that is not at the same time a document of apostasy.

Despite the inclusion of Muslim and Jewish stories of conversion, however, what follows is still predominantly a discussion of Christian conversion narratives. This is in part a matter of practical necessity; to do justice to the different perspectives contained in Jewish and Muslim sources across many centuries and in many cultural contexts would require more than just one additional book. While I hope that the discussion of a few Hebrew and Arabic examples will contribute to their further analysis and discussion apart from a predominantly Christian framework, I also must state frankly that these examples serve in this book above all as foils to highlight the peculiarities of the Christian case. I hope that including such readings here, even in this necessarily schematic way, will point to the rich potential of interconfessional comparison and provide a starting point for more detailed discussions centered on non-Christian examples. Nevertheless, it is not among the goals of the present work to present an exhaustive treatment of sin, salvation, and faith in Judaism and Islam. My intention is, rather, to show how Christian notions of faith, which are

implicit in the concept of conversion itself as it is used in much scholarly literature, can be of only limited use in discussing non-Christian traditions because narratives of religious change convey different notions of sacred history in each.



I have structured each of the following chapters around a series of close readings of conversion stories drawn from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish disputational sources. Because this is not a history of conversion or an exhaustive overview of its sources—and even less a systematic study of the experience of conversion in a real-life missionary context—but is rather a comparison of the use of narrative form to express religious arguments in a wide selection of texts, the chapters do not follow a strictly chronological order. I begin in [Chapter 1](#) with a comparison of two late medieval Iberian cases, that of the late fifteenth-century account purportedly of a Muslim convert to Christianity called Juan Andrés, told as the introduction to a longer anti-Muslim treatise, and that of fifteenth-century rabbi turned bishop, Solomon Halevi/Pablo de Santa María. I show that although Juan incorporates competing biblical models into his late medieval narrative, he is able to sidestep the question, inherent in the Pauline paradigm, of the precise historical and theological role of Judaism within Christian thinking by focusing his offensive on Islam. By comparing Juan's account to that of Solomon Halevi/Pablo de Santa María, a convert who could not avoid this confrontation with the conceptual specter of his Jewish past, I show that Solomon/Pablo's writing was affected by the conceptual tensions he found within the Pauline paradigm of conversion, and that he sought to sublimate those tensions through careful adaptation of the fifth-century interpretation of Augustine of Hippo.

A close reading of Solomon/Pablo's story reveals the traditional Augustinian elements that persisted throughout the Middle Ages, most abundantly in hagiographical conversion narratives, and also shows the philosophical and theological innovations initiated by twelfth-century writers. In [Chapter 2](#), I jump back in time to take up those twelfth-century interventions, with a focus on Moses/Petrus Alfonsi and Judah/Herman of Cologne, to show how the concept of argumentative authority began to change as a response to the incorporation of extrabiblical sources and terms into polemical disputation, and how conversion narratives came to play a specific function in mitigating the theological instability wrought by that change. In [Chapter 3](#), I take a wider view of the same period by

examining the documents related to conversion to Judaism between the ninth century and the twelfth. I show that, while such representations did sometimes reflect a simple narrative structure, just as contemporary Christian examples do, that structure was less prominent than the nonnarrative apologetic arguments being expressed in favor of Jewish belief.

In the fourth chapter, I turn back to Christian writing to follow the evolution of the concept of authority in the texts of the later thirteenth century. I argue that disputational authors—both Dominican friars and their critics—were increasingly concerned with the authenticity of their sources and the uncertain authoritative validity of their claims in light of those sources. They sought to replace the representation of conversion with meditation on translation. In the fifth chapter, I trace the convergence of these two trends of the appeal to authenticity through linguistic and narrative channels in the corpus of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid in the fourteenth century. In his strategic attempt to blend Christian and Jewish models into a single, hybrid discourse in Hebrew, his opus marks both the culmination of this increasing appeal to authenticity and its rhetorical collapse under the weight of its assumptions about authority and identity. [Chapter 6](#) expands the scope of the discussion again to include a comparison of contemporaneous accounts of conversion to Islam from the twelfth century to the fifteenth, including works by Samaw'al al-Maghribī (1126–75), Sa'īd Ḥasan of Alexandria (converted in 1298), 'Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī (fl. fourteenth century), Anselm Turmeda/'Abd Allāh al-Turjumān (ca. 1325–ca. 1423/32). I examine how the rhetorical function of conversion narratives in these examples reflects a more general ideology of religious supersessionism that is expressed in concrete historical terms, in contrast to the figural ideas represented in Christian examples.

I conclude by proposing that the connection between medieval conversion narratives and polemical texts is not fortuitous but bespeaks a fundamental similarity of structure between the two subgenres. By highlighting the implicit narrative affinity of apologetic argument and the representation of conversion, I highlight also the hermeneutic tension within both types of writing between the tendency toward fictional typology and allegory and the persistent need for literal historicity. This tension between singular, microcosmic uniqueness and universal, macrocosmic exemplarity defines both the foundational rhetoric within the Pauline paradigm of conversion as well as its many late antique and medieval invocations and recensions.

CHAPTER 1

From Peripety to Prose

Tracing the Pauline and Augustinian Paradigms

Convert and converter will have to live on united in one and the same person, like two movements of our respiration, like a constant dying and coming to life again of our faith.

—EUGEN ROSENSTOOK-HUESSY, *The Christian Future*

In medieval Christian sources, conversion very often takes the form of a narrative, in particular a narrative derived from biblical, largely New Testament, models. Conversion itself, as a textual drama of transformation, might be considered a Judeo-Christian invention of the late Second Temple period, a fusion of Hebrew tropes and Greek vocabulary. Although abundant images of religious change can be found in many religious traditions, both ancient and modern, Eastern and Western, early Christian renditions marked a decisive shift in the meaning and representation of conversion. In Greece, what first emerged as a distinctive notion of cultic exclusiveness within mystery religions and Orphism was partly fused in Hellenistic culture with a notion of personal commitment to the philosophical pursuit of truth and a stoic turn from passion and illusion to self-mastery. Similarly, an Israelite notion of monotheistic exclusivity and the prophetic call to return to God came to be expressed in new terms within the Hellenistic Jewish world. Upon the emergence of Christianity, traditional biblical tropes of the renewal of faith, a return to an exclusive monotheistic piety, and the call to prophecy began to merge with classical philosophical notions of a commitment to truth and of religious change as a process of turning from one faith to another and one identity to another. In a number of late antique fictions, these tropes came together and took on a distinctively narrative form, but it was the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament, written at the end of the first century or the dawn of the second, that would be best

known among medieval readers and would come to serve as a definitive model for future representations.

It was not uncommon in ancient literature to depict personal change in a narrative guise. But unlike ancient fictions of change or of calling such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or the transformation of Lucius in Apuleius's *Golden Ass*—or even more ancient fictions such as, to take just one extreme example, the commission narrative of Rekhmire, vizier of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II (fifteenth century B.C.)—some Jewish and Christian stories situated an account of personal change, both inner and outer, within the social context of religious exclusivity. The Acts of the Apostles was only one of a number of texts, which included various apocryphal scriptures and ancient fictions, aiming to define both institutional and spiritual or philosophical identity. But, unlike similar contemporary documents, the Acts of the Apostles was canonized as Scripture and disseminated on a vast scale.¹ The canonical Acts, like some of its less famous apocryphal cousins and fictional contemporaries, fused the process of spiritual transformation and repentance with the image of an equally decisive change in social and “religious” affiliation, mapping both onto the structure of a narrative climax and resolution.² In such formulations, conversion's sudden *epistrophē*, or inner turning of mind—Plato's “conversion of the soul,” Plotinus's “return” of the soul to its one source—becomes at the same time a repentance and a sudden change in outer social identity.³ The old self disappears and gives way to the converted self, just as the former religion cedes to and is replaced by a new faith. Conversion came to signify a simultaneous turning of mind and turning of identity only when it came to be structured as a narrative in which the individual's transformation reflected the transformation of society.

This process of fitting Old Testament and Hellenistic images into the mold of a narrative of the origins of the Church, however, was not smooth or easy. The images recast in the book of Acts, especially in their depiction of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus into Paul the Apostle, did not immediately cohere as a unified concept in Christian tradition but instead gave way to a variety of disparate and competing ideas about the meaning of faith and its relation to the Jewish past. The attempt to resolve these debates and answer these challenges by the fourth-century theologian and bishop Augustine of Hippo—one of various late classical writers to attempt to do so—proved to be decisive for subsequent medieval thinking, both in the imagery and conceptualization of conversion and also in the attitudes and policies of medieval Christians toward Jews and Jewish history. In other words, Augustinian ideas about conversion, viewed above all through the narrative lens provided first by the canonical Acts, were formed

and expressed together with Augustine's understanding of Saul/Paul's message and with Augustine's broader theological conception of time, history, and salvation.

The reach of these decisive Augustinian formulations stretches all the way to the end of the medieval period and beyond, but their precise role within medieval thought is difficult to distinguish from that of the biblical language and imagery they are based on. It is especially challenging to discriminate the impact of Augustine's understanding of conversion from that of the Pauline tradition in Acts and also from that of Saul/Paul's words in his various New Testament Epistles. In order to separate the tangled strands of the Pauline and Augustinian paradigms as they were understood in later medieval sources, it is perhaps best—following the contours of a system of thought in which “the last shall be first”—to begin at the end, in the late medieval readings of Saul/Paul and Augustine. The reception of the foundational models of conversion narratives in the later Middle Ages comes sharply into view in the light of two fifteenth-century examples, that of the Xàtivan convert from Islam Juan Andrés and that of the bishop of Burgos, Solomon Halevi/Pablo de Santa María.

As the account of Juan's conversion story shows us, the Pauline paradigm of conversion was, even in his time, a central model for describing many sorts of religious change. Because Juan's text used this paradigm to discuss his conversion from Islam rather than Judaism, however, it is able to avoid the theological tensions inherent in defining the value of the Jewish past in Christian belief that provided ongoing challenges for theologians. His narrative thus provides an illuminating counterpoint to that of Bishop Solomon Halevi/Pablo de Santa María, who, by virtue of his anti-Jewish stance, could not avoid such theological issues. While Juan's account is content to draw from a Pauline model without the help of any later Christian theological apparatus, Solomon/Pablo depends heavily on Augustine's reworking of the Pauline paradigm in which the Jewish past is assigned a clear historical and narrational value. By considering Juan's and Solomon/Pablo's different uses of Pauline and Augustinian models, we can appreciate how the intimate connection between the narrative structure of conversion and Augustine's conception of Christian history proved to be decisive in later anti-Jewish Christian thought even a millennium after Augustine wrote.

TURNING FROM A FATHER'S LAW: THE CONVERSION NARRATIVE OF JUAN ANDRÉS

In 1487, a Muslim *faqīh*, or religious jurist, from the Spanish city of

Xàtiva was visiting the nearby city of Valencia. This Muslim was the son of another Xàtivan *faqīh* named ‘Abd Allāh, who had died some years earlier. After the death of the father, the son had lost the true path, until by chance he found himself in the cathedral where he heard a sermon marking the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin (August 15). What he heard had a profound, catalyzing effect on him, opening his eyes to the truth he felt he was missing and leading him to seek conversion to Christianity. The story is told in what seems like his own first-person voice in the opening to the anti-Muslim *Confusion or Confutation of the Muhammadan Sect and of the Qur’ān* (*Confusión o confutación de la secta Mahomética y del Alcorán*), written almost thirty years later:

[I was from] the city of Xàtiva, where many years before I was born and instructed and taught in the sect of Muhammad by ‘Abd Allāh, my biological father [*natural padre*], who was a *faqīh* for the same city. After his death I succeeded him in his office of *faqīh*, in which I was lost for a long time and had veered off the path of truth, until the year of 1487, when I found myself present in the main church of the illustrious city of Valencia on the day of Our Lady in August, when the very reverend and no less learned man Master Marqués was preaching. Suddenly, the shining rays of divine light...removed and cleared the shadows of my understanding, and then opened the eyes of my soul. Because of the understanding I had of the sect of Muhammad, I clearly recognized that the goal of salvation for which men were created was not by that perverse and evil [law] but through the holy law of Christ.⁴

The alleged author of this anecdote, known after his conversion, according to the text, as Juan Andrés, claims he was sent to Granada by the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabel to preach and try to convert Muslims remaining there after the conquest of 1492, and was again dispatched for a similar purpose by the inquisitor Martín Garcia, later bishop of Barcelona. While the name Juan Andrés appears in a list of canons of the Cathedral of Granada from around 1516, no other testimonies of the author’s life and existence are known. Gerard Wiegers, who considers the issue of authorship to be “crucial” for the interpretation of the work, has raised the vexing question of whether the Juan Andrés who claims to be the author of the *Confusión* could actually be shown by any other means to be a real person.⁵ In what follows, I aim to distance myself from this question of true authorship, not because I consider it unimportant from a historical point of view but because I believe that the function of a conversion story in a polemical treatise is not biographical but rhetorical, serving as a device to establish the authority of the voice of the author as an

authentic witness to the tradition it aims to reject. My goal in the first half of this chapter is thus not to approach Juan's narrative in order to evaluate its truth-value. (For simplicity, I will call the first-person authorial voice "Juan," since he is called thus in the text.) It makes no essential difference to my conclusions if Juan is real or was simply invented to look real. Instead, I will approach his story according to its strategic function as a tool of anti-Muslim discourse.

Juan concludes his opening story by attributing his decision to compose his attack on Islam to his conversion experience. Comparing conversion to translation, he claims, "I turned to [*me convertí*, lit. 'I converted myself (to the task of)'] translating from Arabic into the Aragonese language the entire law of the Moors, called the *Qur'ān*, with its glosses and the seven [*sic*] books of the *Sunna*."⁶ On the basis of these translations, he undertook his denunciation of Islam, the very denunciation introduced and framed by his conversion narrative: "I decided to compose the present work in order to gather together in it some of the fabulous fictions, deceptions, tricks, puerilities, bestialities, follies, filth, infelicities, impossibilities, lies, and contradictions that the perverse and evil Muhammad, in order to deceive simple people, left planted through the books of his sect, especially the *Qur'ān*."⁷ The vitriol that follows continues the inherent language of opposition between Christianity and Islam that he had already built into his first-person account. His conversion consists of an abrupt transformation of understanding and insight that rapidly inverts his identity and his faith. "Suddenly," he says, what he saw "removed the shadows of my understanding." His former faith suddenly became "a perverse and evil" law; Christianity suddenly is a "holy law."

Despite the sources used in his treatment of Islam later in the book—drawn primarily from Islamic texts such as the *Qur'ān* and biographies of the prophet Muhammad—the language and imagery of his narrative are unmistakably biblical, not Qur'anic. By mentioning how "suddenly the shining rays of divine light...opened the eyes of my soul," Juan directly evokes the New Testament model of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, recorded in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, in which "a great light from heaven suddenly shone about" Saul (Acts 22:6), blinding him, until "something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored" (Acts 9:18). Juan, in fact, names Saul/Paul directly as one of his models as he explains the New Testament origins of his name: "I then asked for baptism, and remembering the glorious summoning [*convocación*], which I had heard about, by Christ of John [Juan] and Andrew [Andrés] and the other fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, I had them call me Juan Andrés. When I had received holy orders, being made from a *faqih* and slave of

Lucifer into a priest and minister of Christ, I began like Saint Paul to preach anew [*repredicar*] and profess the opposite of what I falsely believed and affirmed before. And with the help of the high God, first I converted in this kingdom of Valencia and then guided back to salvation many souls of infidel Moors who were lost to the power of Lucifer and on their way to hell.”⁸ Juan’s use of Saul/Paul here is evident in more than name. His allusion to his former post as *alfaquí*, inherited from his father, evokes again the image of Saul/Paul as “educated strictly according to our ancestral law” (Acts 22:3). Indeed, Saul/Paul’s extensive discussion of the law and its role in salvation after the resurrection of Jesus clearly stands in the background of Juan’s description of Christianity and Islam as holy and evil “laws,” respectively. Likewise, Juan’s sudden ministry, in which he “guided back...many souls,” evokes the language with which God sends Saul/Paul to preach to the Gentiles and unbelievers in order “to open their eyes so they might turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18). Like Saul/Paul, Juan also stresses his firsthand knowledge of his former religion. It was “because of the understanding I had of the sect of Muhammad” that he “clearly recognized” the superiority of Christianity, just as Saul/Paul claims that before he saw God’s revelation, he had “advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people” (Galatians 1:14), only later to suffer “the loss of all things” and to “regard them as rubbish” (Philippians 3:8). Juan’s argumentative authority, based directly on his converted persona established in the opening narrative, sets out to “confuse” and “confute” his old law, just as Saul/Paul claims God “has made foolish the wisdom of the world” through “Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:20, 23). Although the model represented by Saul/Paul is that of the transformation of Jew into Christian, it came to serve as the guiding paradigm for virtually all Christian depictions of conversion, including those of late medieval Muslims like Juan.

This Pauline language is premised on an image of conversion as the dawning of a new self, a beginning that breaks with the old and even inverts it. Saul’s transformation into Paul, an example of conversion as the transformation of one thing into its opposite (what Jung terms an “enantiodromia”), is reprised in Juan’s total inversion. He is “made” from a *faqīh* into what he posits as its opposite, “a minister of Christ.” Similarly, he then “began” to speak differently, to “preach anew” (*repredicar*) and to “profess the opposite” (*pregonar el contrario*) of his past beliefs. What “before” he had “believed and affirmed” he now considers “false.” Like Saul/Paul, he considers himself a “minister of Christ Jesus” (Romans 15:16) where he was previously “enslaved to sin” (6:6). These dichotomies (*faqīh*/priest,

true/false, slave to sin/minister of Christ, holy law/evil law, etc.) are deeply Pauline in their logic and imagery and simply repeat in a new key the images of Jew/Greek, flesh/spirit, and inner man/outer man that permeate Saul/Paul's Epistles.

A closer look at Juan's account, however, allows us to distinguish the individual strands of his biblical thinking and imagery and suggests that the biblical tradition of conversion he evokes is, for him, made up of distinct, even disparate parts. Juan mixes his direct reference to Saul/Paul with that of the Gospels, and the language he uses to characterize each shows subtle variations. His adoption of the names of the apostles John and Andrew recalls their "summoning" (*convocación*), a word that directly hearkens back to Christ's "call" to them in Matthew 4:21. This passage, moreover, follows the verse describing when Jesus "began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near'" (4:17), a classic moment of conversion in the New Testament that evokes an image of "turning" back to a former way of thinking. He claims to have "veered off the path of truth," implying his conversion is a return to what he formerly knew to be true, even as it is also an inversion of what he "affirmed before." Juan also uses images of "turning" when he explicitly claims that he "converted" (*convertí*) and then "guid[ed] back" infidel Muslims to salvation (*reduxe a la fin de la salvación*), implying that they too had "veered" and would "return" through conversion. He claims to proceed by "re-collecting" (*recollegir*) the textual proofs from Islam with which he is so familiar. Within Juan's description of his conversion, there are strong images of return and reform that are drawn directly from the image of apostleship and conversion in the Gospels. Such language contrasts sharply with his Pauline imagery, giving the impression that his conversion was a mixture of elements, both a turning back in response to Christ's call and a rupture with the past in which the law was inverted and his old belief was confused. One can see this double image most clearly in the claim that his conversion happened both "suddenly" and after "a long time."

This double-sided language in Juan's short but dense narrative derives from the disparate images of conversion found in his models. The Hebrew Bible itself presents a variety of paradigms to express what later came to be seen in a Christian context as conversion: conversion as a return to a former way of thinking or acting (a turning back), conversion as a rupture with the past that marks the beginning of a new identity (a turning away), conversion as the affiliation with a new community (a turning into), among other images, all in some way in reference to a climactic moment of change. Among these images, one that came to be extremely influential in the Middle Ages, alongside that of Saul/Paul himself, is the portrayal of Jesus, mainly

in the Synoptic Gospels, depicting conversion in the famous description of A. D. Nock as “the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference.”⁹ This image from the Gospels is presented as both the fulfillment and perfection of the law of Moses (Matthew 5:17; cf. Mark 14:49; Matthew 26:56; and John 15:25) and, in other passages, as individual repentance and contrition (Luke 5:32, 13:3). The representation of the call for individual reform by John the Baptist and Jesus was drawn directly from the reproving language of the Latter Prophets in the Tanakh and imitated the traditional prophetic call for communal reform through righteousness, devotion to God, and personal repentance through a turning away from sin and a return to God in both the hearts and actions of his chosen people.

To understand the radical intensity of the Christian messages attributed to John the Baptist and Jesus, we must see them in part as expressions of a more general perspective of apocalyptic eschatology, which also drew its imagery and its urgency from traditional Jewish literature on apocalyptic themes and saw the coming of God’s kingdom and its concomitant peace, harmony, justice, and restoration as imminent.¹⁰ The crucifixion and resurrection embody the fullest expression of this trope, and this expression came to be repeated and ritualized among Christians as a figurative death and rebirth in the action of baptism. Despite its use of apocalyptic themes, however, the early Christian message as expressed in the Gospels followed the Latter Prophets more closely in its reformatory rather than revolutionary character. Jesus’ ministry and teaching are characterized in the Gospels as a reform movement *within* Judaism, depicted as a return to and fulfillment of the law of Moses, not a departure from it. The Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels, especially Matthew, speaks of moral reform, not rupture with the law. The image of reform in the Synoptic Gospels, in other words, is best understood not just as a linear progression away from sin and faithlessness but as a circular return to purity and belief.¹¹ Such concepts were directly adopted from the Septuagint and were consonant with the contemporary Neoplatonic ideas of truth and illusion cultivated within Greco-Roman *paideia* (cultural education) and received into contemporary Hellenistic Jewish thinking.

This message in the Synoptics and, to a lesser extent, in the Gospel of John, differed markedly from that in the Epistles of Paul, and we can see this difference reflected in the mixed language of Juan Andrés. While some of Saul/Paul’s words suggest that he saw the ministry and message of Jesus as a natural continuation and fulfillment of his Jewish faith, which through Jesus was now made available to Gentiles as well, his Epistles also affirm a historical understanding of the

absolute singularity of the resurrection as a dividing line between one age and another. Based on the experience of his personal trajectory from “pharisaic” practice as, according to tradition, the Jew Saul, persecutor of Christianity, to the Christian Paul, disciple of the Risen Christ, Saul/Paul’s assessment of the meaning of Jesus’ resurrection implies not only a continuity but also a revolution, not only a return but also a radical step forward in the unfolding of God’s plan for creation.¹² Saul/Paul’s description of the law repeatedly involves language not only of repetition and return, but also—and indeed more often—of innovation, progress, and even rupture, and has historically been interpreted from both perspectives.¹³

While there continues to be a robust debate within Pauline studies about both Saul/Paul’s conversion and his characterization of Judaism, at least some of his actual statements about the obsolete nature of Jewish law seem to convey an attitude toward tradition as superseded and unnecessary. Circumcision is replaced by baptism, the covenant of the body with that of the spirit, the law of Moses with that of the Risen Christ. “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: Everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Based on such statements, the past—represented by the old self as well as by the old covenant—could be taken as a default term of opposition in the dialectical equation in which Old Israel is not simply rendered obsolete, but shown to be *wrong* by the new Israel of the Christians. Jewish tradition itself is, in this reading, not simply *fulfilled* by Jesus’ teaching or death and resurrection; it is also *ended*, gradually rendered a thing of the past, transformed into the negative correlative of the belief that sees faith in Jesus as the dawn of a new age.¹⁴ Faith in the resurrection in particular, as more than a radical innovation in history that extends the God of Israel to the whole of humanity, becomes an implicit polemic against the past, what Michel Zink calls a “devalorization of history” made “in favor of a perpetual present of Christian life.”¹⁵

This view of the past directly informs many of Saul/Paul’s statements about religious identity. Although use of the word *conversion* is attributed to him in Acts, his thinking and terminology in his writing is very different, above all because it grappled with the meaning of such repentance as a reform movement within Judaism and also in terms of a mission to the Gentiles. Identity as a Jew or a Gentile derived first of all from birth and circumcision, while belief in the God of Israel was open to all and in itself did not make one a Jew.¹⁶ This distinction becomes even more important when we consider that in his Epistles Saul/Paul rarely uses the word *conversion* (*epistrepḥō*) or *repentance* (*metanoia*) and, more important, *never* applies them or their derivatives to his own experience. In fact, he

never refers to himself in his Epistles as a convert of any sort—it might be argued that the term itself is anachronistic to describe his life and experience—but describes himself instead as an “apostle” (*apostolos*) and “servant” (*dolos*), one “set apart” for God (Romans 1:1) rather than turned to him.¹⁷ Saul/Paul’s language of apostleship is patterned on prophetic call narratives from the Hebrew Bible, in which God singles out the prophet and enjoins him, usually against his initial resistance, to deliver the prophetic message to a wayward and refractory people. Saul/Paul himself claims his faith was “received... through a revelation [*apocalypsis*] of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12), not a turning or repentance originated by him but an unveiling that came to him from without.¹⁸

These dual New Testament images of conversion as a return to and a rupture with the law of tradition seem to converge within the narrative presentation in the book of Acts, which dates from approximately 100 C.E. (although estimates vary) and which, as the second part of the book of Luke, is subsequent to the composition of both the other Synoptics and the Epistles.¹⁹ This blending of images had far-reaching consequences for the Christian representation of conversion. Because the character Saul/Paul himself figures so prominently in the story of Acts—more than any other character, including the Apostle Peter and the risen Christ himself—the medieval understanding and reception of his experience as a paradigm for Christian ideas about conversion derive virtually entirely from the hybrid image presented there.

The mixed images of conversion in Acts—which includes many brief conversion accounts, including that of the Samaritans and the Ethiopian Eunuch (in Acts 8), Cornelius (10–11), Lydia, and the Philippian jailor (16), among others—are reflected by its elaborate narrative structure. Saul/Paul’s conversion is told not once but three times in the book, and through this repetition the double imagery of return and departure is fused into a single narrative thread of foreshadowing and memory. In the combination of Saul/Paul’s experience in Acts 9, told diegetically (i.e., through third-person narration) from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, with that of Acts 22, quoted mimetically as indirect discourse in the mouth of Saul/Paul “in Hebrew dialect” (*Ebraidi* dialektō, probably Aramaic, although it is still the work of the omniscient narrator and is still in Greek), the retelling becomes the bridge that unifies action and text, personal experience and communal history.²⁰ This bridging becomes even more explicit in the third rendition of the story in Acts 26:9–18, where Saul/Paul is depicted as describing his conversion again to King Agrippa (Herod Agrippa II). In this third version, the details of Saul/Paul’s experience reflect even more of the perspective of moral

conversion absent from his Epistles. This process of *narrativization* in Acts provided a definitive template for virtually all subsequent conversion narratives, from that of Augustine of Hippo in the fourth century to that of Juan Andrés in the fifteenth.

Juan's story, like most medieval Christian conversion examples, reflects the multiplicity of paradigms that derives from its biblical model. Juan, however, was peculiar in his use of Paul, because his conversion account only serves as the opening of an anti-Muslim, not anti-Jewish, tirade. In this key respect, Juan's narrative, despite its heavy reliance on New Testament models, is not forced to confront the theological tensions built into the manifold paradigm he invokes—Is the law dead or is it fulfilled? Is conversion a reform or a rupture? Such tensions were a source of difficult questions about the role of Judaism within the Church and the role of the Old Testament within the Christian Bible itself, questions that did not vex Juan's assault on the Qur'ān and Islamic tradition.

One late medieval writer who was obliged to confront directly these tensions within the Pauline paradigm of conversion was the well-known fifteenth-century bishop of Burgos, Pablo de Santa María, himself a convert from Judaism, known before his conversion as Solomon Halevi. Written half a century before Juan Andrés, his text provides us with a vivid example of how the issue of Jewish identity was central to the representation of religious change in medieval Christianity and also how the theological problems inherent in that representation were treated in the later Middle Ages. Although his imagery is, like Juan's, unmistakably based on New Testament models, his reading of that imagery depends on the insights of the fourth-century convert, Augustine, bishop of Hippo. A comparison of Solomon/Pablo's conversion narrative with that of Juan Andrés presents us with a clear example of the use of Augustine as the lens through which the Pauline paradigm could be refracted for specifically anti-Jewish purposes.

A FATHER'S BEQUEST: THE CONVERSION NARRATIVE OF SOLOMON HALEVI/PABLO DE SANTA MARÍA

Almost a hundred years before Juan Andrés claims he found himself in the cathedral in Valencia hearing the catalyzing sermon that changed his faith, Ferrán Martínez, the archdeacon of Écija, near Seville, gave a series of perhaps equally provocative sermons that were destined to impact the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and change the

fabric of Iberian society. Although he had been giving similar sermons since 1378, preaching violence and hatred against Jews in the parishes around Seville—even prompting local Jews to petition King Juan I of Castile to order Martínez to curb his rhetoric—things began to change in 1390. Following the deaths of King Juan (leaving the eleven-year-old Enrique III as heir apparent) and the archbishop of Seville in that year, Martínez had been charged with administration of the diocese. In June 1391, Martínez, acting with impunity, preached sermons that inspired masses of people to sack the Jewish quarter and to expropriate two local synagogues for use as churches. This was the first conflict in an outbreak of mob action that spread across much of Castile and Aragon over the following months, killing scores of Jews and forcing thousands of others to accept baptism. The riots of 1391 led to the largest forced mass conversion in Iberian history.²¹ The deep impact that these events had on Iberian history would be felt for many decades, and 1391 has, for better or worse, come to serve as a historiographical fault line dividing the *converso* society of the fifteenth century from all that came before.

Among the numerous Jewish communities that suffered from these strikes was that of Burgos, where Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid had caused a controversy with his public conversion only a half-century before. Around the time of the pogroms, one prominent Jew from the Burgos community, Solomon Halevi, converted and changed his name to Pablo de Santa María. After Abner/Alfonso, Solomon/Pablo (d. 1435) was Burgos's most infamous convert, who rose in the ranks of Castilian society to become a close ally of the Avignon papal contender Benedict XIII. He was also named the tutor to the infant King Juan II of Castile, then was appointed bishop of Cartagena and eventually bishop of Burgos itself. As bishop of Burgos, he also completed, in the last five years of his life, the two works for which he would be best known: a dialogue between a Jew and a Christian (significantly called “Saul” and “Paul”) entitled *Scrutiny of Scriptures* (*Scrutinium Scripturarum*), and from only a few years earlier, the *Additions* (*Additiones*), which were additional glosses appended to the immensely popular biblical commentary of the fourteenth-century Franciscan Nicholas of Lyra. Lyra's glosses, accompanied by Solomon/Pablo's *Additions*, were widely printed and read for over three centuries. The *Scrutiny* also enjoyed wide dissemination and readership in both manuscript and print for centuries afterward. Over twenty-five manuscripts of Solomon/Pablo's *Additions* have been preserved, and the work was published together with Lyra's commentary at least that many times before 1650. The two together “[found their] way into hundreds of libraries across the Continent in scholastic, monastic, cathedral, and courtly settings.”²²

Solomon/Pablo is a remarkable figure, not only because of his political and ecclesiastical prominence in fifteenth-century Castile, but also because he is one of the few people converted circa 1391 who dramatizes his conversion in *narrative* form. It is not surprising that the forced conversions of 1391, which were driven less by theological abstractions than by popular zeal, did not give way to many conversion narratives written by new Christians. Solomon/Pablo's conversion, however, does not follow the pattern of other converted Jews from the late fourteenth century, precisely because his conversion was, by all accounts, not forced and because he is one of the few from that generation in Christian Iberia to incorporate the story of this voluntary conversion into his larger corpus of exegetical and polemical writing.

In his *Scrutiny of Scriptures*, Solomon/Pablo refers to figures such as Abner/Alfonso by name and very clearly follows his predecessors' models by constructing his dialogue as a debate between Jew and Christian (and after the Jew's conversion at the end of part 1, as a debate between "master" and "disciple") and also by incorporating postbiblical, talmudic, and midrashic material as part of his discussion. It differs from Abner/Alfonso's text, however, in that Solomon/Pablo does not frame his argument with his conversion story. In fact, the simple absence of any conversion story in the introduction to the *Scrutiny* makes it resemble a typical theological polemic of the Christian *Adversus Iudaeos* tradition—a resemblance reinforced by the fact that it was written in Latin and not Castilian or Hebrew—rather than a rhetorically complex first-person treatise like those written by the convert Moses/Petrus Alfonsi in the twelfth century or Abner/Alfonso in the fourteenth.

Even though Solomon/Pablo did not frame his dialogue with a conversion account, he *did* write a short narrative of conversion, publishing it in an even more conspicuous place: as the very opening to his exegetical glosses on Nicholas of Lyra. Because Lyra's commentary was copied so frequently, Solomon/Pablo's prologue containing his conversion narrative became, serendipitously, among the most widely disseminated medieval accounts of conversion in the early modern world. Even Luther read his conversion narrative along with his glosses and directly credited Solomon/Pablo, known in early modern theology as Burgensis, as a source of his knowledge of Jewish exegesis.²³ It is thus all the more remarkable that Solomon/Pablo's text is almost completely overlooked in modern scholarship.

Solomon/Pablo's narrative is interesting for a number of reasons beyond the fact of its wide dissemination. Although it seems on the surface like a thoroughly conventional account that exemplifies a venerable tradition of understanding conversion that stretched back

many centuries, its tropes and imagery reflect an already changing state of affairs in which writers like him struggled to balance the traditional imagery of conversion inherited from the Bible and the Patristic Fathers with new philosophical arguments and extrabiblical sources that came to occupy an increasingly important place in disputational writing after the twelfth century. As an embodiment of both traditional imagery and a changing polemical vocabulary, the short conversion account of Solomon/Pablo offers a unique window into the history of the representation of conversion in Christian tradition in the wake of 1391.

His narrative is also of great interest because it follows 1391, but also because it was written *before* the decisive shift in the political and literary significance of conversion that took place in the wake of the anti-*converso* riots and legislation of Toledo in 1449. The riots broke out over an unpopular tax imposed by the constable Álvaro de Luna, which happened to be collected by the treasurer Alfonso Cota, a *converso*. In protest against the tax, mobs sacked the houses of numerous *conversos* and imprisoned or expelled their owners. Not long after, a Toledan public figure, Pero Sarmiento, who seems to have played a role in inciting the mobs, oversaw the proclamation of a new law known as the *Sentencia-Estatuto* (*Judgment Statute*), barring converts *and their descendants* from holding public office in Toledo, receiving ecclesiastical benefits, or giving testimony in court. In what can be seen as the death blow to long-standing medieval papal doctrines supporting the protection of Jews—doctrines that derived ultimately from Augustine’s theological ideas—Sarmiento proffered what would develop into the later concept of “purity of blood” (*limpieza de sangre*).²⁴ This concept, which would become of central importance for the Spanish Inquisition, distinguished in genealogical terms between “old” (i.e., nonconverted) Christians and “new” (recently converted) Christians. In helping craft the *Sentencia-Estatuto*, Sarmiento introduced the first official statute of discrimination against converts and their offspring, which would have included Solomon/Pablo and his family.

The fact that Solomon/Pablo’s conversion account was written before 1449 is also interesting because it takes the form of a letter to his son, Alonso de Cartagena, whose conversion at a young age along with his father is mentioned in the text. After he inherited the office of bishop of Burgos from his father, Alonso would be forced to live through the public outcry against converts in 1449 and would even attempt to defend conversion on theological grounds as subsequent anti-*converso* ideas spread. Alonso was largely unsuccessful in his defense of converts (including himself), and after the sea change of 1449 conversion from Judaism became a permanent stigma of a very

dangerous sort. We can imagine that Solomon/Pablo's conversion narrative might have looked very different if it had appeared twenty years later than it did.

In the light of Alonso's later trials and failed attempt to defend conversion, Solomon/Pablo's personal tale, which is dedicated to him, takes on a poignant irony. Solomon/Pablo begins with explicit mention of his old age and legacy:

What do you want me to give you now, my dearest son, while I am still alive? What bequest [should I bequeath] to you after I am gone? [Nothing] except whatever brings knowledge of Holy Scripture and steadies your steps with a real ardor for the Catholic truth [*gressus tuos in catholicae veritatis solidissimo fervore confirmet*]. For this is what I bear in my heart and profess with my lips, about which I think it has been written: "The father will make the truth known to his children" (Isaiah 38:19).²⁵

He explicitly frames his exegetical glosses with his promise to Alonso to give him "his truth" within the context of passing on his inheritance.²⁶ He then uses this opening promise to affirm that part of what he will pass on is the truth he discovered through conversion:

Since I had not received this [truth] in my boyhood, but [rather] was born under the perfidy of Jewish blindness, I had not learned sacred letters from holy teachers but I gleaned erroneous meanings from erroneous teachers, always busy to rashly enwrap [*temerarie involvere satagens*] the correct letters with incorrect sophistries [*litteram rectam non rectis cavillationibus*], like the other mavens [*duces*] of that perfidy. But, truly, when it pleased Him whose mercy knows no measure to recall me from darkness to light, from the murky whirlpool [*calignosa turbine*] to the clear air: somehow the scales fell from the eyes of my mind, and I began to reread Holy Scripture somewhat more assiduously, [and I began] to seek after the truth, not faithlessly any longer, but humbly.²⁷

Solomon/Pablo here directly blends Saul/Paul's language in the Epistle to Galatians 1:13–15 ("You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism") with the characterization of Saul/Paul in Acts of the Apostles 9:18 ("Immediately something like scales fell from his eyes"). On the other hand, Solomon/Pablo seems to introduce an element not in Galatians: rather than offering a "revelation" of Christ, God chooses to "recall" Solomon/Pablo from his error. Conversion is, in this representation, not an event but an understanding, not an experience in the world but a subjective realignment within the soul. This interiorization of the Pauline paradigm, which recasts conversion as a

hermeneutic rather than cosmic, mystical, or emotional change, is further evident in the expansion of the Pauline image of blindness and restored sight—understood both literally and symbolically—into Solomon/Pablo’s explicit mention of Jewish blindness and mental sight in which the “scales” of his former understanding “fall” from his view. In such images, we begin to see the confluence of various biblical paradigms into a single, hermeneutical model in which conversion is no longer a revelation or a moral turning but a new kind of understanding.

This trajectory, putting increasing emphasis on the hermeneutical transformation wrought by conversion, continues even more strongly in the rest of Solomon/Pablo’s account as he “waited night and day for His help”:

So it happened that the desire for the Catholic faith was more strongly enkindled in my mind from day to day, until I professed publicly that very faith I was carrying in my heart; and at about the same age as you are now, I underwent the sacrament of baptism in the holy font of this church, taking the name of Paul.... But before this time, applying myself to the study of Scripture, I gave attention to the reading of both Testaments, sometimes by hearing from living teachers, often by rereading the works of the holy Doctors and of other eminent men who have passed from this life. Through the gift of divine clemency, I who had formerly been a teacher of error was now made a student of the truth.²⁸

In many details, Solomon/Pablo’s narrative resembles that of Juan Andrés very closely. He casts his conversion in biblical terms and reflects the multiple models contained within the biblical canon itself. Also Solomon/Pablo experiences an inversion of his identity from “teacher of error” to “student of the truth,” and just as in Juan’s conversion, Solomon/Pablo’s happened “through divine grace” rather than the strength of will. At first, the language with which he describes his transformation seems to depict a climactic moment of insight rather than admonitory homiletic depicting a will to reform the self. Solomon/Pablo does not say that he recognized himself as fallen and in need of a moral or spiritual reform, but instead paints himself, in very Pauline terms, as an object of God’s action. It was only “when it truly pleased him whose mercy knows no measure to recall me” that he is converted, suggesting that Solomon/Pablo saw his conversion as the result of God’s decision rather than his own.

Despite such similarities, there are even more important differences. Although Solomon/Pablo’s language is, like Juan’s, thoroughly Pauline—Solomon/Pablo’s choice of baptismal name is, of course, not fortuitous—it also betrays a new, subjective understanding

in which conversion is not premised on the singular revelation of a truth, not on a sudden thunderbolt from above, but on a progressive, even gradual alteration of inner understanding. Solomon/Pablo claims that his baptism is only a final detail in the transformation already under way within his soul. He began reading *both* Testaments before his baptism and claims to have both studied with Christian teachers and read Christian books. When God “recalled” him “from a misty whirlwind to serene air,” he “*began to reread sacred scripture*” and “to search for truth.” His conversion begins with God’s call but is realized only through rereading and a gradual alteration in understanding. Solomon/Pablo holds this new, burgeoning truth “in my heart,” dissimulating his faith while the truth “was more strongly enkindled in my mind from day to day.” He characterizes his change as both a dialectical ascent “from darkness to light” and as a return to the text, a “rereading” rather than an abandonment of his earlier knowledge. The action of returning to the Bible through rereading is reflected back into the form of his narrative of that return as a recounting.

Even more important, by framing his biblical exegesis in the *Additions* with his personal conversion story in its prologue, Solomon/Pablo draws a parallel between his hermeneutic conversion and the rereadings he presents in his exegesis throughout the rest of the text. He casts his image as a Christian and a bishop against the backdrop of his former life as a Jew, and casts his Christian exegesis, the keystone of his conversion, as a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Latin Scripture, a transformation of the Old Testament into the New. Because his exegesis involves abundant material from the Hebrew Bible and frequent references to the Talmud, Jewish midrashim (rabbinical commentaries and narratives), and later Jewish thinkers like the French exegete Rashi (d. 1105) and the Iberian-born philosopher Maimonides (d. 1204), Solomon/Pablo’s narrative of transformation cannot simply remain, like Juan’s, “an inversion” of all he formerly believed. Both his identity as a convert from Judaism and his reading of Scripture must address more precisely the relationship between old and new, Jew and Christian, the law of Moses and the law of Christ. Does the new replace and destroy the old, or is the old the necessary foundation of the new? What place does the old self and its authoritative texts have in the voice and teaching of the new? Because Solomon/Pablo chooses *not* to “forget what lies behind,” as Saul/Paul claims to do in Philippians 3:13, but instead builds his conversion and his biblical commentary on a return to his past, his hermeneutic turn must also confront the tensions inherent in the biblical models he cites.

This narrative return to the past leads him to explain in more detail his characterization of the relationship between past and

present. Like most medieval Christians speaking about the value of the past, and especially of the Old Testament, Solomon/Pablo employs the language of supersessionism. For him, the Old Testament was divine Scripture in which God revealed himself and established a covenant through Abraham and Moses. Upon the coming of Jesus, God did not change his covenant with Israel but rather fulfilled it by extending its truth to all nations. The New Israel has replaced the Old, and this is nowhere more in evidence than in the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Old Testament in the teachings of the New. When Solomon/Pablo characterizes his teaching in personal terms as that of a father to a son, he is moved to construct his conversion narrative as a vehicle for revealing the typological fulfillment of the Old Testament by the New. He sees his conversion not only as a personal testimony of transformation and faith, but also as a symbol of God's providential plan, prophesied in Scripture and fulfilled in his own story of conversion. In this light, he stresses the historic and prophetic importance of his and his son's former name, Halevi. Just as Moses decreed that the sons of Levi should have no inheritance because of their sacerdotal role (Deuteronomy 18:1), so Solomon/Pablo, writing as bishop of Burgos, describes the fruit of his conversion as the "possession" that he passes on to Alfonso as an "inheritance."²⁹

This dedication of the work to his son is not gratuitous. Just as the stories of conversion of Saul/Paul and the early apostles in Acts serve as the foundational narratives of the Church itself, so Solomon/Pablo presents his story as the opening of his multivolume commentary on the entire corpus of Old and New Testaments and as the foundation of his story of worldly success and his rise to ecclesiastical prominence, which he also mentions directly.³⁰ By showing that through his transformation from Jew to Christian, "worldly things were added to ecclesiastical ones," Solomon/Pablo draws a direct parallel between his foundational fiction and that of the Church itself. Through his use of narrative as the basis of both his biblical exegesis and his attack on Judaism, he juxtaposes the metamorphosis of Saul into Paul and Hebrew Scripture into Christian Scripture with his conversion from Solomon to Pablo. By depicting his opus and his name as a bequest, he amplifies this appeal to the past as a foretokening of the present and future by drawing parallels between his own experience and that of his son. By invoking prophecy about the tribe of Levi—similar to the twelfth-century text of Judah/Herman of Cologne, which we will consider in the next chapter—and by stressing his "assuming the name of Paul," Solomon/Pablo presents his conversion as the fulfillment of an earlier Jewish prophecy, a fulfillment that continues by passing on his sacerdotal name to Alonso. Significantly, as I have mentioned, Alonso literally followed his father as inheritor of the bishopric of

Burgos upon Solomon/Pablo's death in 1435, just as his brother had become bishop of Plasencia in 1423. By mentioning "these successes, which common men call the events of fortune," Solomon/Pablo explicitly reminds his son that their inheritance has been as much material as spiritual. Through his narrative, he both literally and figuratively bequeaths his conversion to his son, and his legacy is one of both letter and spirit, the prophecy of the old self and its fulfillment in the new.

The typological reading of history, both public and private, reflects and frames the exegetical approach in the subsequent glosses to Nicholas of Lyra. Solomon/Pablo in fact directly follows his conversion story with a detailed description in the rest of the prologue of his approach to Scripture, stressing the importance of preserving the literal meaning of Scripture while also understanding its figurative and typological meaning.³¹ He implies a kind of parallel between his life and the text of Scripture when he applies an exegetical model to his biography. Just as he was converted from wrong to right interpretation, "recalled" from "shadows to light," so the biblical *testimonia* he invokes were "transformed," through proper reading, from Jewish Scriptures into proofs of Christian doctrine. Just as in his conversion "the scales fell from the eyes of my mind, and I began to reread sacred scripture," so through his additions (in the exegetical *Additions* that follow his account) and scrutiny of Scripture (in his *Scrutiny* a few years later), his rereading rescued the Scriptures from the literal "perfidy" in which they had lain prisoner. His sources, like his name, could be read "not faithlessly any longer," but correctly as authoritative proofs of Christianity.

This typological structure is further embodied by Solomon/Pablo's distinction between public confession and private belief "in my heart," a distinction that mirrors his Christian exegetical perspective that distinguishes between the "outer" and "inner" meaning of Scripture, the "flesh" and the "spirit" of the believer. This inner/outer distinction is combined with a past/present distinction in which Christianity fulfills the inner potential of God's covenant in the Bible while Judaism merely preserves its outer form. Just as the Hebrew Bible itself offered typological proof of the New Testament, so Solomon/Pablo's conversion narrative stages in miniature, emblematic form the Christian idea of the transformation of all Jews into believing Christians. Conversion involves both a turning of his belief as well as a turning of his sources from strictly Jewish authorities into Christian proof texts and, dramatizing the logic of exegetical typology, of the translation of the Hebrew Bible into the Latin Vulgate. By framing his whole exegetical project with a brief story of his transformation, he makes Christian figurative reading, the "scrutiny of Scripture," an

extension of the process of conversion itself. At the same time, he makes the *narration* of conversion a fulfillment of the promise given in the event narrated. Experience itself, expressed through the cipher of typological reading, becomes a prophecy to be fulfilled in its retelling. Man and text, recollection and rereading, sympathetically reinforce each other as on parallel axes of transformation.

Yet Solomon/Pablo's theory of reading goes beyond a mere parallel comparison between man and text. Part of his response to the lingering question of the role of the Jewish past in Christian soteriology is to defend his story of his conversion as a teaching tool for younger generations. In this, he characterizes memory as a didactic tool necessary for the continuance of a living tradition. "I gladly tell you these things, so that...you might commit them to memory [*memoriae tradas*] and...explain them to younger people who perhaps did not hear of them, so that they in turn should tell [them] to their sons, so that 'they do not forget the works of God, but investigate his law.'"³² Solomon/Pablo here evokes Psalm 78:5–7 and Deuteronomy 6:7, in which fathers teach sons, who in turn teach their own sons. He "narrate[s] this" to his son and future generations of readers "lest they forget [*ne obliviscantur*]."

This call to memory is also part of his polemical characterization of the role of Jews and Judaism in Christian history. Solomon/Pablo also cites one of the central verses of medieval Christian writing about Jews, Psalm 59:11: "Do not kill them, or my people may forget [*nequando obliviscantur*]." In Christian tradition, this verse, perhaps more than any other, came to express the Christian stance on the role of Jews in God's divine plan. Solomon/Pablo fits himself and his conversion squarely within this tradition by depicting his conversion narrative as a call to preserve Christian memory of their inheritance, raising them to the status of True Israel. He explains in his comment on Psalm 59 later in the *Additions*, "Slay them not...so that they be moved to conversion [*ad conversionem provocentur*] and so they do not forget your holy books, because they reside originally with them.... Scatter them...that is, may they be scattered among all the nations, so there be a witness of the sacred scripture that is among them."³³

As part of his bequest to his son, he thus includes the exegetical commentary that follows his account as well as his identity as a converted Jewish priest. His conversion was both a revelation and a return, both a fulfillment of Scripture and a narrative recollection in which he depicts himself as a witness to that Scripture's true meaning. As convert, exegete, and priest, he becomes an epitome of both history and text, a figure to be interpreted just like the Scripture on which he comments, a new testament to its own hidden truth. He himself says as much: "This is, my son, my last testament, these are my codicils.

From them know that this has been bequeathed beforehand [*ex illis praelegatum agnosce*], ‘that your will may rest in the law of the Lord and that you may meditate on His law day and night.’ Truly, by rereading these and similar things, you will in fact make your meditating purer and sweeter.”³⁴

Although he evokes the name of Saul/Paul as his model, his language and imagery go far beyond the Pauline model. In fact, in the exegetical discussion that constitutes the bulk of the prologue to the *Additions*, the name he cites more than any other—twice as often as that of Saul/Paul—is Augustine of Hippo. In order to follow Solomon/Pablo’s reception and use of Augustine in his reading of the Pauline paradigm, it is necessary also to look briefly, by way of contrast, at Augustine’s own narrative of conversion a millennium earlier in the *Confessions*. Keeping Solomon/Pablo’s story in mind while turning back to this premedieval model, we must ask what elements allowed Augustine’s story to become the dominant medieval counterpoint to Saul/Paul’s story in Acts.

REREADING THE AUGUSTINIAN BOOK OF THE SELF

Following the climactic scene at the end of book 8 of the *Confessions*, in which Augustine hears the fateful and mysterious voice of a child in a Milanese garden telling him to “take it and read [*tolle, lege*],” he says to God, “You turned me to you [*convertisti enim me ad te*].”³⁵ Although this moment is treated as a kind of skeleton key to the understanding of both the *Confessions* and Augustine’s later writing, it is not his only mention of conversion. Excluding his references to himself, we find at least ten other references to baptism and conversion outside of book 8 and no fewer than seven others in book 8 alone. The construction of the text in this way recapitulates the structure of Acts, in which Saul/Paul’s conversion is told and retold as the keynote in a string of numerous other conversions.³⁶ Of all of the conversions in book 8, however, only one, besides Augustine’s own, is described with a form of the word *convert* (*convertito/conversus*), that of Anthony, who was converted by hearing the Gospel of Matthew. When Augustine tells God “You converted me unto yourself” at the end of book 8, he is summarizing a course of events that resembles Anthony’s story closely.

Augustine explains, “I had heard how Anthony, though he merely ‘chanced to be present when a certain passage of scripture was read,’ nonetheless took it to heart [*cui forte supervenerat, admonitus fuerit*] as meant specifically for him.... [A]t this divine signal [*oraculo*] he [was] turned [*conversum*] suddenly to you.”³⁷ This scene is the culmination

of a multilayered narrative of Anthony's life in the mouth of Ponticianus that itself contains accounts of the conversions of two friends and their betrothed. Augustine tells first how Ponticianus "chanced to see a book that lay on our gaming table. He picked it up, opened it, and found...[the letters of] Saint Paul."³⁸ This chance discovery of the Epistles leads him to begin narrating the life of Saint Anthony, to which Augustine "listened in silent absorption." Just outside of Milan, in fact, two friends of Ponticianus, off on a stroll, similarly "chanced in their walk" to enter a monastery:

They came across a book there containing the life of Anthony. As one of them began to read it, he was stunned and took fire [*mirari et accendi*], and even...began to consider taking up such a life himself.... Suddenly filled with holy love and an appropriate shame [*so-brio pudore*], angry at himself, he looked at his friend and said: Please tell me where, with all this busy striving of ours, we are trying to reach?...Those were his words as, racked by the birth pangs of a new self, he turned back to the book and, reading further, was changed in his depths right before your eyes, and—as was soon made evident—his mind sloughed off the world [*exuebatur mundo mens eius*].

His decision based on his reading of Anthony inspired his friend, and their joint decision to convert inspired their fiancées to do so as well, and together they "dedicated their own virginity to" God.³⁹

In this scene, conversion forms part of a dialectic of listening and telling. We read as Augustine tells how he heard Ponticianus retell how a reading of Anthony's life moved him to convert. "While Ponticianus was telling this story," Augustine explains, "you, Lord, used his words to wrench me around to front myself [*retorquebas me ad me ipsum*]."⁴⁰ Each of these narrative layers includes a chance discovery of a text that seems to speak to the reader as if it were an auspicious sign. Ponticianus happens to see Saul/Paul's Epistles and thus begins telling the tale that in turn begins to move Augustine. His friend, a character in Augustine's account, happens to discover the life of Anthony, and thus decides to convert, moving other characters to do so as well. The life of Anthony that he reads tells how Anthony happens to hear a verse from Matthew and, seeing it as a sign to him, is moved to convert. All of this comes after Augustine relates how his friend Simplicianus related to him the story told of the conversion of the orator Marius Victorinus, so important in stimulating Augustine's own transformation.⁴¹

It is through this series of two narrations of other narrations—and in Ponticianus's story of his friend, that narration is itself about yet another narration—that Augustine introduces his experience in the

garden. These stories converge as Augustine, like the friend of Ponticianus, happens to go off with his friend Alpius when he hears the voice of a child directing him to “take it up and read it.” Like Anthony, he interprets the randomly chosen passage (Romans 13:13) as a sign directed at him, and like Anthony, he is thus converted. Like the betrothed of Ponticianus’s friends, Augustine is finally moved to celibacy. Like Ponticianus, the text he happens to see is that of Saul/Paul. Nowhere else does Augustine’s dramatic technique interweave so many different narrative levels and perspectives, so many chronologies. The stories of book 8 are defining aspects of the concept of conversion in the *Confessions*, establishing a pattern that would be imitated by many medieval writers, including Solomon/Pablo.

Various other books describe Augustine’s many stages of transformation, as Garry Wills explains, “from Christianity to Manichaeism, from Manichaeism to a Ciceronian Skepticism, from Skepticism to Materialism, from Materialism to Neoplatonism...from Neoplatonism to Christianity,” and finally from lust to celibacy.⁴² In contradistinction to all of these earlier ‘axial’ moments, in which reading plays a key role, the various conversions that follow in book 8 hinge more decidedly on reading in a dialectic alternation with the depiction of hearing and telling.⁴³ Augustine draws a direct connection not between conversion and knowledge or conversion and experience but between conversion and *representation*, especially representation through (and of) a narrative about the past. To be sure, Augustine uses the word *conversion* many times in the *Confessions*, and in fact his use of the word does not stand out more frequently in book 8 than elsewhere.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, by strategically placing book 8 as the final moment before his baptism, Augustine highlights this dialectical combination of reading, hearing, remembering, and telling as the quintessential and defining characteristic of conversion in the text.⁴⁵

In this presentation, as in subsequent medieval imitations, Augustine’s conversion is intimately linked with that of Saul/Paul. The string of discoveries and rereadings that follows this declaration comes to a climax at the very end of book 8, upon the chance reading of Romans 13:13–14, and as O’Donnell has observed, this moment is preceded by a repeated turn to Romans throughout book 8 (*Confessions*, 3:3). Romans had in fact been the focus of Augustine’s constant meditation in the years leading up to the *Confessions*, above all as he pondered the question of free will and the nature of God’s grace. This attention to Saul/Paul, and to Romans in particular, had formed the front line of his repeated criticism of the Manichaeans. Immediately after his conversion, Saul/Paul turns up comparatively rarely in Augustine’s subsequent writings, the so-called Cassiciacum

dialogues (*Contra Academicos*, *De beata vita*, *De ordine*, as well as the *Soliloquia*). It becomes a vital concern to Augustine only in the 390s, when he is forced not only to overcome his Manichaeism in private but to engage his rivals in public, rivals that included the learned Manichaean Faustus. Mani's dualism of good and evil found comfortable language in Saul/Paul's opaque dichotomies, and as part of his rejection of these views Augustine had to confront this latent binary thinking in the Epistles while simultaneously affirming the canonical authority of both the Old Testament and the Acts of the Apostles, both rejected by the Manichaeans.⁴⁶ This entailed the reading of Saul/Paul's theology of grace through the lens of his conversion as narrated in Acts, a reading that required both an explanation of God's action on the road to Damascus and of Luke's structuring of that action in the form of narrative. As Fredriksen explains, "Here, before the watching eyes of his own church... Augustine had to confront publicly a well-organized Manichaean sect that based much of its deterministic and dualistic doctrine on the Pauline Epistles. To proceed against the Manichaeans, Augustine had to reclaim Paul."⁴⁷

After two early commentaries on Romans in the mid-390s,⁴⁸ Augustine again returned to Paul's writing in answering (ca. 396–98) the questions of his friend Simplicianus, bishop of Milan, and then formulating decisively his view of human will and freedom. In what Peter Brown calls "the intellectual charter for the *Confessions*," Augustine argued that even the will to turn to God is itself a gift of God's grace and concludes (in 1.2.12), "Without [God] first calling us, we cannot even will [*nisi eius vocatione non volumus*]."⁴⁹ God's choice to call some out of the *massa damnata*—the lump of damned humanity to which most were fated through Adam's fall—is gratuitous and inscrutable. In his philosophy of history, itself a by-product of this developing theory of grace, Augustine was also bound to include both the meaning of the law—including both the Old Testament and the Jewish community itself—and the meaning of individual salvation in conversion.⁵⁰

This breakthrough in Augustine's understanding of the role of grace, which would form the conceptual foundation of his later diatribe against the Pelagians and their rejection of original sin, hinged on his exegesis of Romans developed during his conflicts with the Manichaeans. In addition, Augustine came to see Saul/Paul's conversion story, as depicted in Acts, as a model for his theory of grace, in which the soterial trajectories of history and the individual self came to be aligned.⁵¹ It was in his reading of Romans in light of Saul/Paul's conversion in Acts that Augustine first articulated a unified theory of God's action in the world. While this took the

theological form of the affirmation of the ubiquity and omnipotence of grace, it had consequences for his understanding of all other aspects of his *Weltanschauung*, including his notions of history, of scripture, and of the identity of the converted self. By most accounts, the understanding that he worked out in his exegetical engagement with Saul/Paul governed his thinking for the rest of his life.⁵² His self-patterning on the structure of the Pauline paradigm also provided a model for the later medieval imitation of Saul/Paul as a template for all conversion, both of the individual soul and of the Church itself.

Augustine's representation of conversion in the *Confessions*, which was also a reflection on time and narrative and a defense of the exegetical interpretation of the past, came to be the predominant medieval paradigm of conversion because, I will argue, it resolved the tensions within the Pauline tradition concerning the value of the past and unified its various aspects into one coherent doctrine. It did this, moreover, by elaborating a *typological* model of time—what could also be called *figural* time—in which the past does not only precede the present and future, but also prophesies its later unfolding and fulfillment. In Augustine's more mature view, achieved through an elaborate and painful meditation on theodicy, Scripture can be understood entirely “historically” and, *at the same time*, as a form of figural prophecy. In this paradoxical formulation meant to vindicate the literal, historical meaning of the Old Testament in the face of an overweening *allegoresis* among early exegetes, Augustine constructs a comprehensive idea of history that includes past, present, and future in a single temporal scheme. Augustine's conception of history and of Scripture through the exegetical logic of *figurae*, of prefiguration and fulfillment, directly impacted his reading of Saul/Paul and determined his characterization of his conversion in narrative terms. With this model, which applied equally to Christian understanding of Scripture (Old Testament and New Testament), the self (old self and new self), and history (Jews and Christians, “Old Israel” and “New Israel”), Augustine clarified any lingering uncertainty about the value of the past within the manifold Pauline paradigm of conversion by skillfully elaborating its inchoate typology and weaving together its different concepts of time.⁵³ He used the logic of exegesis to fuse profane history with sacred time into a single, figural web of *Heilsgeschichte*.

Narrative was an apposite form to embody this model of salvation history and of exegesis because it allowed him to represent time as a unified fabric in which the past looks ahead to the future through foreshadowing and the present looks back to the past in memory. In narratological terms, this proleptic and analeptic view (i.e., a perspective that flashes forward and back) unifies past and present history into a single story of anticipation and fulfillment.⁵⁴ By

thinking of history through the unifying terms of narrative, Augustine reads Acts as a circular, not merely linear, dialectic of time. Rather than viewing the time of history as a linear unfolding in which the past is dead once it is fulfilled in the future, he sees time as a spiraling gyre that returns to the past as the permanent precondition of its future and the future as the necessary correlative of the past. This dialectic view of time casts Saul/Paul's conversion as a process of transformation in which the old self, like the Old Testament, is not rejected but superseded and incorporated into the new through a diachronic relation of potential and actualization.

Moreover, and most important, this understanding of the New Testament and of the book of Acts in particular provided Augustine with a narrative template for his conversion. The exegetical model that guided his thinking on Judaism applied equally to his story, in which the events of his life fit together in a single fabric of meaning that reflected the dialectic of God's unremitting grace and Augustine's embattled and dilatory response. By conceiving of history in this way, as Brian Stock explains, Augustine likewise "learned to think of the past, present, and future of his life as if he were interpreting a text."⁵⁵ Within the texture of his account, his life becomes a reflection of the same rule of prophecy he uncovered by his reading of the Epistle to the Romans through the lens of the book of Acts: that all of time is singularly present to God's omniscience, and what to human perception moves in a line from past to future exists for God as a seamless web of eternal meaning. "In your transcendent present state of eternity [*presentis aeternitatis*], you are before all past time and after all future time.... [Eternity is your today]."⁵⁶ The centrality of narration as the principal mode of representing conversion in book 8 of the *Confessions*, as well as the meditations on time and memory in books 10 and 11 and the exegesis of Genesis in 12 and 13, all derive from Augustine's alignment of Scripture, self, and history as parallel expressions of God's comprehensive grace. Together they preserve the salvific value of the past and yet still affirm the ongoing validity of Christian truth in the present and future.



Paula Fredriksen has observed that Augustine's reading of Saul/Paul had two major effects in his thought (which, we can add, directly impacted subsequent Christian tradition): it made Saul/Paul's conversion the key to Pauline thinking (thus making Luke's account in Acts the cardinal index to subsequent understanding of Saul/Paul's ideas in the Epistles), and it made "the inner life of man...the

sovereign arena of God's work of redemption."⁵⁷ Augustine's highly original rendition of the Pauline tradition proved to be the dominant paradigm on which were based virtually all Western Christian conversion narratives over the subsequent millennium, including that of Solomon/Pablo. His first-person presentation of his conversion experience in exegetical terms as well as his explicit connection of his conversion in the *Additions* with his anti-Jewish argument both depend directly on an Augustinian reading of the Pauline paradigm of conversion.

Even so, Solomon/Pablo's narrative also contains elements that are extraneous to Augustine's formulation, reflecting the evolution of his ideas about conversion and Judaism as they had evolved over the preceding millennium. Solomon/Pablo blends his conversion account and his biblical exegesis with a heavy dose of postbiblical sources from rabbinical tradition, turning to the Bible, the Talmud, and the work of Christian exegetes, along with that of Jewish exegetes as well. Similarly, he has regular recourse to Aristotle and his medieval interpreters, both Jewish and Christian (and occasionally Muslim). It is very telling that the citations from Augustine's *Literal Commentary on Genesis* as well as those from Aristotle are, like much of the prologue itself, in fact derived secondhand from Thomas Aquinas.⁵⁸

Both of these strains of thought—postbiblical writing by Jews and Muslims and Aristotle filtered through Jewish and Christian philosophy—were recent arrivals in Christian exegesis and polemic, gaining importance only in the twelfth century and after. Both, moreover, presented formidable challenges to the Augustinian paradigm of conversion, challenges to which Solomon/Pablo is heir. Finished shortly before the final breakdown in Iberia of the long moribund Augustinian doctrine of Jewish witness—only two decades before the anti-*converso* riots of 1449—his conversion narrative and the exegesis and anti-Jewish assertions that followed it are at once vestiges of a superannuated idea and a harbinger of radical change. Just as Solomon/Pablo read Saul/Paul through Augustine, so he read Augustine through the exegesis and polemic of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It was then, upon the introduction of Aristotelian philosophy and non-Christian exegetical authorities into religious argument, that the Augustinian paradigm underwent its most decisive transformation. It is to the twelfth-century origins of that change that we now turn.

CHAPTER 2

Alterity and *Auctoritas*

Reason and the Twelfth-Century Expansion of Authority

The question of the representation of difference is therefore always also a problem of authority.

—HOMI BHABHA, *The Location of Culture*

In the beginning of his *Little Work on His Conversion*, written sometime in the middle decades of the twelfth century, Judah/Herman, the “former Jew” (*quondam iudaeus*), as he is called, observes the following in a letter to a certain Henry that precedes his conversion story: “I was not converted with that ease with which we often see many unbelievers...converted to the Catholic faith by a swift and unanticipated change [*repentina et inopinata mutatione*]....[B]y contrast, my conversion was gained in the face of powerful waves of temptations...and, finally, with the greatest toil. For these reasons, it ought to be as delightful [*delectabilis*] for pious ears to hear, as it is amazing [*mirabilis*] in light of the difficulty with which it came to pass.”¹ “*Tanto delectabilis...quanto mirabilis*,” “as delightful as it is amazing.” So amazing, in fact, that some critics argue that Judah/Herman’s is not a real account of a real person, sparking the debate over facticity to which I alluded in the introduction.² More fruitful than the issue of the real Judah/Herman’s existence and experience—a question now handily reframed by Jean-Claude Schmitt—is the question of how to read Judah/Herman as a character, a protagonist in a gripping narrative. One can begin by asking why Judah/Herman the protagonist—already a character in the story even before the action begins—claims that his text will be “more pleasurable” because his conversion was “more difficult” than most. Following the logic of the parables of the prodigal son or the lost sheep, by which “there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent” (Luke 15:7),

the further the convert strays from the truth, the more delightful will be his final reform and conversion. What meaning did this hold for Judah/Herman and his readers?

The standard for the drama of the arduous conversion was, as we have seen, set by Augustine. Given that Judah/Herman, after his conversion, writes, “[I] changed my life with my way of dress [*regulam vitam cum habitu mutavi*], according to the rule of St. Augustine,” his model is obvious, pointing directly back to Augustine’s characterization of the fruits of conversion gained through “great toil.”³ In his multilayered meditation on conversion in book 8 of the *Confessions*, considered in the previous chapter, Augustine pays particular attention to the conversion of the orator Marius Victorinus and considers how a longer and more difficult conversion leads in the end to a greater joy. He uses the conversion of Victorinus to reflect on the nature of this law of mutual inversion, explaining that “joy is always greater after greater affliction [*maius gaudium molestia maiore praeceditur*].”⁴ Such a phenomenon can be seen, he says, in the case of ship passengers despairing of imminent death and then miraculously surviving a shipwreck or a mortally ill man unexpectedly getting well. The same surprise of joy is a dramatic effect of a protracted and difficult conversion. “For, the enemy [the devil] is *more overcome* in [losing] him of whom he had more hold and through whom he held many [others].”⁵ Other Christians also have greater cause to rejoice at the conversion of a great man because, like the well-known Victorinus, such a figure becomes an “*auctorita[s] ad salutem*,” a “model for salvation” for other Christians to imitate. To be sure, after Augustine heard of the orator’s conversion, he “was on fire to do as he did.”⁶

By calling Victorinus an *auctoritas*, Augustine epitomizes his unified vision in which the individual soul becomes a staging ground for the drama of salvation history writ large. His characterization of Victorinus as an *auctoritas* also signals an important aspect of his understanding of conversion that will eventually take the center of that dramatic stage: the connection between conversion narratives and authority. This is evident in his characterization of the Jews in a letter to Bishop Paulinus of Nola in 414 as a *testimonium scripturarum*, “a testimony of the Scriptures,” and a witness of the old Mosaic law given by God “so that the name of Christ...would be distinguished as superior by such authority [*ut christi nomen...tanta auctoritate praepolleat*].”⁷ For Augustine, as for centuries of medieval Christian theologians and thinkers who followed his model, Jews were witnesses to the triumph of Christianity and preservers of the Old Testament in which that triumph was first prophesied. They were, as he stated repeatedly, the *capsarii* of the Christians, the slaves who

carry their masters' books, a formulation that was repeated throughout the Middle Ages, including the succinct statement of Aquinas that Jews "are our book-carriers, guarding the books [*nostri capsarii, custodientes libros*] from which the testimony to our faith is shown."⁸ In this logic, by not recognizing the authority of Jesus to interpret the law, Jews actually affirm it, granting authority to Christianity through the testimony of their disbelief.

Augustine's paradoxical ideas on Judaism as an authoritative theological "witness" to Christianity formed part of a stable and widespread notion of what Jeremy Cohen and others have termed the "Hermeneutical Jew," the view of Judaism understood in terms only of Christian exegesis. As a cornerstone of Christian self-understanding, it remained a stable concept of repair, despite challenges and variations, until the end of the eleventh century.⁹ It was not until the end of the eleventh century, when writers began to rearticulate the same theological arguments of previous centuries on the basis of rational argument rather than biblical *testimonia* alone, that this connection between conversion and authority began to change. The nature of those changes directly affected the representation of conversion in polemical writing and led to a decisive forging of charges against Jews and authoritative testimony by Jewish converts.

The now well-documented transformation of the Augustinian doctrine of witness in twelfth-century Christian thought not only affected the characterization of Jews. It also led to a new characterization of conversion itself, one directly reflected by the character of Judah/Herman. In particular, by using the recounting of conversion as a vehicle to express theological truths, twelfth-century writers like the author of the *Little Work* began to fashion the figure of the convert as a symbol of history itself. If we allow ourselves to read the best known conversion narratives of the twelfth century—that of Moses/Petrus Alfonsi (conv. 1106) at the beginning of the twelfth century and that of Judah/Herman a few decades later—with this symbolism in mind, these texts show themselves to be more than simple reflections of increasing Christian hostility toward non-Christians (or representations of the mentality of real converts), as various critics have proposed. They emerge also as expressions of apologetic discourse aimed at recuperating a radically destabilized notion of Christian authority.

Pursuing this argument will lead us to connect two related historical processes. First, we will find that the introduction of *ratio*, reason, into polemical language in the late eleventh century not only expanded the foundation of traditional proofs beyond the evocation of biblical testimonies and trusted *auctores*. It also destabilized the very meaning of authority in this writing, creating a gap through which

other sources could be brought in to substantiate one's claims. In particular, it allowed room for a discourse of personal testimony and first-person appeal to enter what had traditionally been closed and formulaic justification based on biblical proofs. Second, we will see that this destabilization of authority by reason through which testimony also entered apologetic discourse in particular gave rise to the use of conversion as a device for constructing an authorial voice and acceptable argument in a way that had not existed before the twelfth century. The familiar narratives of Moses/Petrus Alfonsi and Judah/Herman of Cologne can thus be read not simply as expressions of a burgeoning rhetoric of anti-Judaism, but also as explicit responses to late eleventh- and early twelfth-century changes in the nature of authority in religious disputation. The first step on this path of reading, before we turn to the stories themselves, is to trace the important changes within the concept of *auctoritas* that intensified over the course of the eleventh century.

MEDIEVAL AUTHORITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Around the middle of the eleventh century in Cologne, not far from the scene of Judah/Herman's conversion in the *Little Work*, a crucifixion scene was carved into an ivory plaque. Under Christ's outstretched arms, behind Mary and John, are two women, the allegorical representations of Church (*Ecclesia*) and Synagogue (*Synagoga*). While *Synagoga* has almost been eclipsed in this scene, her eyes are still open and her staff is still upright. Little did the artist who carved her know that, within a few generations, she would appear in a very different guise. Although *Synagoga* had long been a feature in Western Christian iconography in her symbolic opposition to *Ecclesia*, it was not until the late eleventh century and especially in the twelfth century that she began acquiring the characteristic traits that would define her in centuries to come: blindfolded with a broken staff, the tablets of the law falling from her hands, her crown coming off her head, defeated and humiliated by *Ecclesia*.¹⁰

This shift, in which the confrontation of *Synagoga* and *Ecclesia* began to evolve from static typology to active polemic, points to a similar development in anti-Jewish writing that reached a high-water mark by the twelfth century.¹¹ Jaroslav Pelikan has noted that the twelfth century "seems to have produced more treatises of Jewish-Christian disputation than any preceding century of the Middle Ages, perhaps as many as all those centuries combined." More important than numbers, however, are the dramatic changes in content. As Pelikan explains, "The treatises of this period stand out...not only

quantitatively but also qualitatively.... [T]he existential situation between spokesmen for Judaism and spokesmen for Christianity had changed.”¹² Although many factors have been suggested to explain what precipitated this increased focus on Jews and Judaism, evident in iconography as well as in papal legislation, one key circumstance that has not been thoroughly considered was a growing crisis in the understanding of argumentative authority, of textual *auctoritas*.

An *auctor*, or written authority, distinguished from a mere author, is not only one who is responsible for a work but, more often, someone who is to be believed and quoted. The *auctor* possesses *auctoritas*, the authority to speak truly, the wisdom to speak well, and the credibility to be trusted as a source. *Auctoritas* was patient of two different semantic aspects, both of which persisted throughout the Middle Ages. On the one hand, it was the power to initiate or create, the power of an *auctor*, a source or maker, ultimately ascribed to God. On the other, it was by extension the imitability passed on by that maker to his heirs. It is also the power given to God’s vicar to *authorize* through word and example. As Dante tells us in the *Convivio* in his reflection on the origin of the word, “‘Author,’ in this derivation, is used for any person deserving of being believed and obeyed [*degnà d’essere creduta e obedita*]....[H]ence we can see that authority means ‘pronouncement worthy of faith and obedience.’”¹³ Curiously, this double meaning seems to be in part due to the overlapping of the etymologically distinct *auctor* (from *augeo*, “to increase or bring about”) and *actor* (from *ago*, “to do”), and such comparisons between trusted authors and mere writers of texts often played on this difference.¹⁴ What was “authoritative” drew its power from both a legitimizing appeal to originality and a secondary appeal to the inheritance of that originality. Thus, authority could pertain as well to the maker and the made, the originator and his epigone, the author in whom one believed and his authorized commentator whom one trusted.

As every area of the *trivium* and *quadrivium* had *auctores* particular to it, so the *auctoritas* for biblical exegesis and, by extension, polemical writing was derived from the source viewed as most ancient and true, the Bible, whose *auctor* was none other than God himself. In works prior to the twelfth century, the relative importance of the human author was eclipsed by the divine *auctor*, and if a writer expressed a truth, it was attributable to the *auctoritas* inherent in his sources, not to his own authority. As Michel Zimmermann put it, “The author hides behind the *auctoritas*.”¹⁵ This common medieval trope of self-effacement persisted well past the eleventh century, and in fact became even more common in the early twelfth century. Gilbert of Poitiers (d. 1154) is emblematic of a widely accepted practice when

he takes special care in his commentary on Boethius to say that he “does not want to bring forth [*afferre*] anything by our own authority” but wants only “to convey [*referre*] the sense of the author [*auctoris*].”¹⁶ Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) pushed this confidence in *auctoritas* to its limits in his *Benjamin Minor*, proclaiming, “Every truth that the authority of Scripture does not confirm is suspect to me, nor do I accept Christ in His glorification if Moses and Elijah do not stand beside Him.... [L]et [Jesus] present the authority of Scripture not only figuratively but openly [*non solum figuratiue, sed etiam aperte*] to prove the truth of his revelation.”¹⁷

Such emphatic endorsements of the *auctoritas* of the *auctores*, above all of Scripture, over the mundane authorship of the contemporary commentator or writer (or even of the mundane person of Jesus) betray a major shift occurring in the conception of *auctoritas* in the twelfth century. The change, especially in connection with conversion, stands out more clearly in comparison with early medieval texts. Among the best known medieval characterizations of conversion on the basis of authority are the anecdotes recorded in Gregory of Tours’s *Historia Francorum* (*History of the Franks*), from the late sixth century. In one of Gregory’s famous anecdotes (which also include the story of the conversion of King Clovis), Avitus, bishop of Clermont-Ferrand in the 570s and 580s, successfully brings hundreds of Jews to convert. This event, later dramatized in verse, probably at Gregory’s suggestion, by Venantius Fortunatus, is the prime non-Iberian example in this period of large-scale conversion. Gregory relates how Avitus regularly exhorted the Jews to “contemplate with a pure heart, having dropped the veil [*relicto velamine*] of Mosaic law, Christ, the son of the living God, who was promised by the authority of the Law and the prophets.”¹⁸ *Understanding* in this context does not follow from reason but is a recognition of authority, both Scriptural and ecclesiastical.

Similarly, in the following book, when Gregory and Chilperic I, king of Neustria (d. 584), debated with a Jew named Priscus—a Jew who Gregory claims was later murdered “on his way to the synagogue” by Phatyr, a recent convert from Judaism—again no mention is made of an appeal to logic or reason. Rather, the king mounts an attack in distinctly Augustinian language, arguing again that Christ was promised by the prophets: “You cannot accept that the mysteries of the Church were prefigured in the sacrifices of your own race.”¹⁹ Gregory himself joined this disputation, promising Priscus, “[I will] pierce you with your own sword, producing proof not from the Gospels, nor from an apostle, neither of which you believe, but from your own Scriptures.”²⁰ Despite this, Gregory’s intervention was to no avail and the Jew was unmoved because he refused to recognize the authority presented to him. In these appeals, *ratio* plays no part. Belief

and conversion hinge only on reading the authorities correctly and accepting their *auctoritas*. The conventional picture painted by Gregory would remain recognizable to readers for five centuries to come.

The nature of authority began to change, however, when it was linked definitively to reason. Although reason was rarely connected to conversion until the twelfth century, *auctoritas* had long been paired with it in other contexts, and the terms are associated even in Cicero and Quintilian. Augustine makes use of this dyad of reason and authority as well, describing both as necessary for understanding and belief, respectively.²¹ The two were also paired frequently in Carolingian and high medieval exegesis, where *ratio* came increasingly to complement *auctoritas* and even, in some cases, to challenge it. In the *Periphyseon*, or *On the Division of Nature (De divisionae naturae)* of John Scotus Eriugena (ca. 815–77), which took the form of a dialogue between master and student, the student affirms that “authority proceeds from true reason, but reason certainly does not proceed from authority,” and even more boldly, that “no one can enter Heaven except through philosophy.” Eriugena’s elder Rabanus Maurus (ca. 780–856) criticized such brazen assertions as heretical.²² Of Rabanus’s generation, Agobard of Lyons (ca. 779–840) similarly minces no words in his upbraiding of his colleague Fredegistus for challenging the “unshaken and firm authority [*inconcussa et firma auctoritas*] of those [biblical] authors,” and for doing so, moreover, “with your syllogisms.”²³

The terms eventually became opposing keywords at the locus of conflict in twelfth-century argumentative writing, when *ratio* began to unseat, or at least challenge, the inveterate dominion of *auctoritas* as the principal source of proof and credibility. This process of challenge started in eleventh-century theological discussions, when the framework surrounding their formerly hierarchical relationship began to slip and give way to a more certain conception of the power of reason in justifying or challenging faith. An early indication in theological discussions of a change in the relationship between the two methods, claims by authority and claims by rational proof, can be found in the well-known remarks of Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury (d. 1089). Lanfranc chided the theologian Berengar of Tours (d. 1088) for his assertions concerning the Eucharist: “Having given up sacred authorities, you take refuge [*confugium facis*] in dialectic. On the subject of the mystery of faith...I prefer to understand and respond with sacred authorities [rather] than with dialectical reasons.”²⁴ Despite such protests, Anslem, Lanfranc’s successor as archbishop of Canterbury, only a few decades later composed his *Cur Deus homo (Why Did God Become Man?)*, perhaps in

response to the *Disputatio Judei et Christiani* sent to him by Gilbert of Crispin, abbot of Westminster.²⁵ Anselm argued, “Whatever is, must be. Whatever is to be, of necessity will be...for this [Christ] became man...for therefore were [his deeds] necessary, because they were to be, and they were to be because they were, and they were because they were [*futura erant, quia fuerunt; et fuerunt, quia fuerunt*]” Responding to “the words of infidels,” he offers one of the first strictly rational, philosophical apologies for Christian doctrine.²⁶ Anselm’s is thus considered to be the inaugural text in a series of new rationalist treatises seeking to define and defend Christian doctrine with the tools of reason and philosophy.

The familiar conflict of *ratio* and *auctoritas* brewing in eleventh-century theological discussions such as that between Lanfranc and Berengar reflects tensions between *ratio* and *auctoritas* going back at least to Eriugena. Although this conflict seems to have been precipitated by the writings of Anselm and Gilbert, it burst to the surface in the pointed remarks of Adelard of Bath (ca. 1080–ca. 1152), in his *Natural Questions* (*Quaestiones naturales*). Claiming that his nephew (his interlocutor) follows “reason as a guide [*ratione duce*],” Adelard accuses him of blindly following the “halter” of authority: “For what else can authority [*auctoritas*] be called other than a halter [*capistrum*]? As brute animals are led wherever one pleases by a halter but do not know where or why they are led, and only follow the rope by which they are held, so the authority of written words [or writers] leads not a few into danger.”²⁷ Authority, once a sturdy pillar of thought, was becoming for some a stifling shackle.

Adelard’s sharp comparison between rational thought (learned, he declares unabashedly, “from Arab masters”) and authority was an opening salvo in what would become a more pitched battle in the twelfth century, determining the evolution of exegesis as well as theology in subsequent writing. Accusations of misplaced allegiance began to sprout up from both sides, leading Abelard to argue in *Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian*, “In every clash of disputation truth established by reasoning is more solid [*firmior*] than the display of authority.”²⁸ Such open declarations raised the hackles of traditional exegetes and theologians. Provoking condemnation from some of Abelard’s contemporaries, such as his former teacher Roscelin of Compiègne (d. 1120 or 1125), this criticism was not limited to Abelard alone. William of Saint Thierry complained in his letter to Bernard of Clairvaux that William of Conches, a philosopher and grammarian at the School of Chartres, was no better. The latter repeated whatever Abelard said and in so doing “arrogantly mocks [*superbe irridet*] the history of divine authorities,” proffering a new philosophy in place of tradition.²⁹ At the turn of the

thirteenth century, Alain of Lille joined this debate in his harangue against Jews, heretics, and Muslims by famously quipping that “authority has a nose of wax,” malleable in any direction, and so must be evaluated by reason only.³⁰ Such widely divergent opinions, to which one can add many more examples, point to the emergence in the early twelfth century of what Marie-Dominique Chenu calls the “new and more evident insufficiency of authorities.”³¹

Even so, the *auctoritas* of Scripture as true revelation was, in the realm of biblical exegesis and theology, itself never under scrutiny or doubt, and the divine authority of Scripture always trumped that of secular texts.³² The authority of Scripture was derived from the absolute supremacy of its divine author, and there was in traditional polemics, following Augustine’s firm distinction between authoritative and apocryphal Scriptures, a total confidence in the power of biblical *auctoritas* to justify true apologetic claims.³³ Conrad of Hirsau (ca. 1070–ca. 1150), although he includes numerous non-Christian works of antiquity in his *Dialogus super auctores*, specifies that in comparison with Scripture, profane *fabulae* are like a voice that speaks “without meaning anything [sed *nichil significantis*].”³⁴ Peter Damiani (d. 1072) concedes that rational arguments may serve to “close the mouth of the Jews” but are inferior to Scripture. About St. Eleuchadius (d. 112), who allegedly gave up philosophy upon being converted by St. Apollinaris (traditionally believed to have been ordained bishop by St. Peter), he boasted, “The wisdom of Plato was outdone by a disciple of a fisherman.”³⁵ The hierarchy of revelation over reason is obvious in a number of his works. In his *Dialogue between an Inquiring Jew and a Christian Responding to the Contrary* (*Dialogus inter Iudaeum Requirentem et Christianum e Contrario Respondentem*), written as a letter to the monk Honestus, Damiani constructs his dialogue almost entirely on appeals to scriptural *auctoritates*. Although he tacks on one rational assertion for good measure, hoping to try anything that might induce conversion, he openly disparages the “rhetorical eloquence” and “sharp arguments” of philosophers, preferring instead the “almost bare texts from Scripture.”³⁶ While his brief, perfunctory appeal to reason might be taken as a indication of changes to come, Damiani’s final appeal to the Jew to follow the “path of grace” to conversion is still firmly within a traditional Augustinian formulation.

Because of this natural hierarchy of Scripture over profane literature, which was never truly subverted in medieval writing, the question thus was not *Is reason truer than revelation?* but rather *Is it more effective for conveying, teaching, and defending the truth?* It was over this question that *ratio* and *auctoritas* came to cross swords in the confrontational literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This contest led directly to the search for other means, neither rational nor

Scriptural, to shore up Christian truth in the face of unbelief. I now wish to turn directly to the responses to that conflict, evident both in the deliberate pairing of reason and authority as partners in dispute and, even more important, in the emergence of a new discourse of personal testimony.

INTRODUCING THE POLEMICAL *AUCTOR*

Although the challenges to *auctoritas* by rational proofs in the realm of theological apologetics and polemical writing never upset the integrity of revelation or challenged the truth of Scripture itself, they did lead to a reformulation of the foundations of proof that integrated reason and authority into a workable pair. Honorius Augustodunensis (ca. 1080–ca. 1137) expressed this blending of the two already in the early twelfth century, when he stated, “Authority is nothing other than the truth that is proved by reason,” a statement later picked up and repeated in similar terms by Albert the Great.³⁷ In twelfth-century writing against the Jews, authors did not argue, as Anselm of Canterbury and Odo of Cambrai affirm, “by reason alone,” but instead did so with the double method of both reason *and* authorities (*ratione et auctoritatibus*). Even Gilbert Crispin’s frequently mentioned *Dispute of a Jew and a Christian* and the less popular *Dispute of a Christian with a Gentile*, which marked a new page in Christian argumentation only a few decades later by claiming to turn entirely to rational proofs, in practice still never fully abandoned the appeal to *auctoritas* and tempered their endorsement of rationality with regular citations and discussions of Scripture.³⁸

Although the pairing of *ratio* and *auctoritas* can be seen in numerous twelfth-century writers, including Peter Lombard (ca. 1100–ca. 1160), Peter of Blois (ca. 1135–ca. 1205), Hugh of St. Victor (ca. 1096/1141), and numerous others, it acquired a heightened significance in apologetic writing, where the means of justifying faith to non-Christians was the central topic of debate.³⁹ One very clear example of this two-pronged approach is given by Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, who lays out his method in his anti-Jewish *Against the Inveterate Obduracy of the Jews* (*Adversus Iudaeorum Inveteratam Duritiem*) as a combination of both rational and Scriptural proofs. He thus appealed to his imaginary Jewish interlocutor on both fronts simultaneously: “Since all of these things, O Jews, are proven both by sacred authorities and by invincible reasons [et *auctoritatibus sacris, et rationibus invictis*], what do you maintain [*quid sustinetis*]? If you give credence in your Scriptural authorities, yield to them. If you are rational or reasonable, acquiesce in the reasons.”⁴⁰ By finding a

place for reason, Peter, it seems, felt he had all his bases covered.

But Peter did not fully appreciate the dangerous game he was playing. Despite this attempt to blend *auctoritas* and *ratio* into a combined method that preserved the traditional roles of each component, the introduction of rational arguments into a field of discourse and thinking traditionally dominated by the exegesis of Scripture opened the door to a larger reevaluation of the very foundation of apologetic self-understanding in Christian theology. Put differently, when authority came to be paired with reason in Christian discourse, its traditional meaning had to be reevaluated and rearticulated. In that process, it came to share a stage with reason, but also with personal testimony (and eventually, in general terms, individual authorship). While scholars have explained these twelfth-century changes as part of the context of much larger changes under way in twelfth-century intellectual culture, they have less often described or understood these changes as a development in the meaning of *auctoritas* itself.⁴¹ Without seeking to challenge the accepted historiography of, in Jeremy Cohen's words, the "gradual dismantling of the Augustinian position on the Jews during both the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries," I wish to consider this "dismantling" not as an issue concerned only with Jews or Muslims but also as part of what Gilbert Dahan has called the "remarkable... evolution" of both reason and authority in Christian thought in this period. It is within this "expansion of the notion of authority" that we can most meaningfully situate the conversion narratives of the twelfth century and, as we will see in the next chapter, the mendicant preaching movements of the thirteenth.⁴²

The "expansion" of traditional proofs made only "with authorities" into proofs made both by *ratione et auctoritatibus* was part of a wider late eleventh- and early twelfth-century development involving the reaffirmation of basic Christian beliefs on rational grounds and also of the exploration of non-Christian beliefs, of which Western Christian thinkers became increasingly aware in the twelfth century. The incorporation of reason into apologetic writing is of a piece with an emergent focus on heresy and the boundaries between orthodox and heterodox belief. While these changes, on the level of social and economic history, have been linked with the emergence of what R. I. Moore has termed "a persecuting society," they are the result of a stricter definition and more widespread enforcement of normative Christian beliefs in opposition to imagined deviations and perversions of the natural order. The corresponding intellectual shift involved a narrower conception of orthodoxy and a more vigorous interrogation of heresy. This came to include Christian heresy along with Judaism and Islam as well, and also led to a more specific

description of the whole spectrum of various marginalized groups that included lepers, cripples, homosexuals, and others. This history is widely known and does not need to be rehearsed here.⁴³

As long-held tenets of Christian faith were articulated in more precise terms, including a more precise definition of heresy and of the boundaries of normative belief, the contours of all that fell outside those boundaries likewise came more clearly into focus and brought about an implicit widening of the Western Christian worldview. Certainly, this widening was elaborated in many areas besides theology, especially in the military exploits in non-Christian territories such as the conquest of Toledo (1085) and Sicily (1091) and the launching of the first crusade (1095)—all of which occasioned, in their way, instances of conversion to Christianity.⁴⁴ In religious controversy, this involved a more acute awareness of the limitations of traditional justifications and explanations of belief. The disruption and redefinition of existing social hierarchies within Western Christendom and of the world beyond its borders was paralleled by a disruption and rearticulation of traditional notions of textual authority in theological and apologetic writing.

The introduction of a more ambitious discourse of reason in the twelfth century signaled an emergent need on the part of Christian thinkers to appeal to foundations beyond traditional Scriptural authority in order to justify and defend traditional beliefs. While these extra-Scriptural proofs first included only philosophical claims, some polemical texts gradually incorporated elements that came to include first-person narratives of the lives of the authors themselves. Among the concepts and tools that had to be adjusted or adapted were traditional notions of Judaism and Jewish authorities. The long-standing notion of the Jew as little more than a poor interpreter of the Bible needed to be redefined, like the very concept of authority, according to a larger sense of argumentative proof. While early twelfth-century anti-Jewish works in Latin such as those of Gilbert Crispin, Odo of Cambrai, and Moses/Petrus Alfonsi were clearly not intended for a Jewish readership but were instead directed to Christians as a form of internal Christian apologetic, nevertheless the use of non-Scriptural proofs evinced a new awareness of the disparate natures of the hermeneutical and contemporary Jews and a concomitant need to update the former to accord more accurately with the growing complexity of the latter as they were perceived in Christian understanding. This imperative is especially evident in Peter the Venerable's oft-cited remarks that contemporary Jews can be considered as less than human beasts because they lack both the reason to accept Jesus as the Messiah and the willingness to accept even their own authorities. "I do not know completely," he remarks,

“if the Jew, who neither believes human reason nor accepts authorities, divine and his own, is a man.”⁴⁵

Peter’s condemnation of what he saw as Jewish irrationality constitutes part of his effort to bring the increasingly complex image of the contemporary, “real” Jew into harmony with the image that had long defined the hermeneutical Jew of traditional discourse: the Jew as one who disbelieves authorities. Similarly, the remarks of Thomas Aquinas a century later in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* point to a new awareness of the relativity of authority in dealing with Muslims as well: “Because some [non-Christians], like the Mohammedans and the pagans, do not agree with us in accepting the authority of any Scripture, by which they may be convinced of their error...[w]e must, therefore, have recourse to the natural reason [*ad naturalem rationem recurrere*], to which all men are forced to give their assent.”⁴⁶ Even though Aquinas is careful to specify that reason is “deficient” (*deficiens*) in questions of divine truth, his remarks, like those of Peter, reflect a process of expanding the very concept of authoritative proof to include, in some contexts, more than biblical *testimonia*. As Dominique Iogna-Prat explains, for Peter, “widening the notion of authority amounted to invoking testimonies and examples from the margins of Christian tradition.”⁴⁷

This process of the expansion of *auctoritas* is exemplified by the increasing awareness of and attention to non-Christian interpretive traditions and Scriptures. These included above all rabbinical writing (Talmud and Midrash) and the Qur’ān, both of which substantially entered into apologetic thought in the twelfth century.⁴⁸ The sudden appearance of the Talmud, Midrash, Qur’ān, and *ḥadīth* in the *Dialogue against the Jews* (*Dialogus contra Iudaeos*) of Moses/Petrus Alfonsi and both *Against the Sect of the Saracens* (*Contra sectam Sarracenorum*) and *Against the Inveterate Obduracy of the Jews* of Peter the Venerable (the same Peter who commissioned Robert of Ketton to complete the first Latin translation of the Qur’ān) bespeaks an unprecedented expansion in the scope of Christian references, one that provided a new vocabulary for the representation of conversion.⁴⁹

In Peter the Venerable’s remarks, part of his complaint about Jewish disbelief specifies that Jews reject not only Christian authorities, but their *own* authorities as well. In this remark we can discern the point at which the mounting Christian censure of heresy intersected with Christian anti-Jewish (and anti-Muslim) rhetoric. Jewish belief always played an active role in the Christian imagination, but it had traditionally fallen outside of Christian control, and forced conversion had long been forbidden, at least in theory. By claiming that the Jew disbelieves his own sources, Peter sets the stage for what in the thirteenth century will become a claim

that *Jewish* disbelief in Hebrew authorities that allegedly speak of Jesus as the Messiah (such as the Talmud and Midrash) constitutes a form of *Christian* heresy. This change in the Christian perception of the nature of Jewish texts also implicitly carried with it a change in the limits of acceptable “jurisdiction” of the enforcement of Christian orthodoxy and belief.

The new characterization that emerged in the twelfth century began to blur the boundaries between external questions of belief (Jewish belief or disbelief in their own authorities) and questions in the domain of Christian theology (they accept neither reason nor divine authorities). Historians have vigorously debated the nature and extent of this shift, especially in the thirteenth-century work of Dominican and Franciscan friars, and have questioned if it in effect constituted, in one historian’s view, “a new Christian ideology with regard to the Jews” or if, in another’s estimation, Christians “made no break with prior conceptions of Judaism and the Jews.”⁵⁰ Such historiographical debates have sometimes understated a central issue at stake in either view, namely, the palpable shift in the extent and definition of textual *auctoritates* within twelfth-century Christian thought and the impact that this had on the meaning of *auctoritas* itself in defense of Christian belief. Whatever its effect on other issues may have been, this shift was initially (and, I would argue, primarily) an internal shift in Christian theological categories. Approaching the well-worn disputational sources of the twelfth century from this direction—the direction of changing notions of authority—provides a new perspective on the conversion narratives affixed to those sources as well.

In his study of medieval authorship and authority, A. J. Minnis explains that a text was never accepted as an *auctoritas* without careful evaluation, and “two criteria for the award of this accolade were tacitly applied: ‘intrinsic worth’ and ‘authenticity.’”⁵¹ To have intrinsic worth meant that what one said or wrote did not contradict Christian doctrine; to have authenticity indicated that an *auctor* was somehow connected with an ancient and true source, “the genuine production of a named *auctor*.”⁵² By expanding the traditional canon of *auctores* or pseudo-*auctores* to include non-Christian works and so redefining the very nature of *auctoritas* in polemics, writers such as Peter the Venerable were brought face-to-face with a perplexing paradox: rabbinical writing in Hebrew and Aramaic and original Islamic works in Arabic possessed the positive and commanding quality of authenticity, but they most certainly did not contain “intrinsic worth.” Much that directly contradicted Christian doctrine was vitally present in the very texts Christians sought to employ.⁵³ The invocation of *auctoritates* considered authoritative by Jews and Muslims but *not* by

Christians evidenced the growing desire by Christian controversialists for authenticity, claimed at the expense, one might say, of intrinsic worth.

Writers sought to resolve this tension between authenticity and the instability of authoritative proof in two principal ways: by stressing authenticity as more important through an increased attention to the original language and form of the texts (a strategy we will consider in more detail in the next chapter) and through the invocation of the endorsing testimony of converts, both actual and fictional. Because the convert is at once an authentic source of knowledge of his old religion and a manifest rejector of the veracity of that knowledge, his narrated personal experience of triumph over his past serves to symbolize the historical replacement of one idea of truth by another and the desired pacific defeat of the infidel by incorporating him, now tamed, into the body of orthodoxy. By speaking with the voice of a convert, writers aimed to penetrate the shell of symbolic difference surrounding the dubious authorities of the infidel, and so to bridge the widening gap between authenticity and intrinsic worth in their arguments.

This conflict between authenticity and intrinsic worth, moreover, came at a time when the role of the human author in theological and exegetical commentary was itself undergoing a major shift. Within traditional prologues to authoritative texts in the various branches of the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, it was normal to comment in some way on the circumstances of the work's genesis by explaining its title, topic, goal, the name and intention of its author, the branch of learning to which it pertained, the order of its contents, and the quality of its material. In exegetical and theological sources (especially in the prologue denominated "type C" by Minnis and Hunt) this extensive introduction was shortened to comment only on the material and branch of learning to which it applied, and, significantly, the intention and authoritative status of the author.⁵⁴ As the human author came to play an increasingly visible role in expounding the mind of the divine *auctor*, his identity became liable to more scrutiny (and, in some cases, more praise). The notable changes in the status of the human author in these sources in the twelfth century and, even more dramatically, in the thirteenth, directly impinged on the characterization of the writer of polemics as well.

As Minnis has explained, the introduction in the thirteenth century of an Aristotelian notion of "efficient cause," coupled with an already shifting notion of individual authorship, led to a more vigorous assertion of the role of the individual contemporary author, even in theology and exegesis, in which the true *auctor* was always understood to be God and not the human writer. In the twelfth

century, in which the revealed status of non-Christian writing such as the Talmud and Qur'ān was ambivalent and God's role as their *auctor* problematic, the author himself faced an increased pressure on his authorial role as a spokesman for the legitimacy of his authorities. Because he came to speak about texts whose *auctoritas* derived more from their authenticity than their intrinsic worth to Christian belief, the convert-author, acting as a bridge between the two, needed to establish his own *auctoritas*, and he did so through the depiction of his conversion. These circumstances of his genesis as a Christian author came to fill the gaps left by the questionable circumstances surrounding the use of his extra-Christian sources as pro-Christian *auctoritates*.

Logically, in contemporary works by converts that lack an overtly polemical intent such as those of the child convert Guillaume de Flaix (or Fly)—abducted into Christianity by a local count during an assault on the Jews of Rouen by crusaders in 1096 and then raised in a monastery—there is a notable *lack* of any conversion story.⁵⁵ Similar examples of nonpolemical autobiographical texts (all drawing heavily from Augustine) include those of Otloh of St. Emmeran (d. ca. 1072), of Saint Aelred, abbot of Rievaulx (d. 1167), and the “memoirs” from ca. 1115 of Guibert of Nogent (d. ca. 1125). Otloh's work, especially his discussion of his temptations along his spiritual path of conversion to a monastic life, could well be described as a sort of conversion story like those considered in this book. The nature of his conversion account, however, is intended as a spiritual exercise rather than being used to delineate the boundaries between Christianity and its rivals. Similarly in Aelred's treatises as well as in the account of his life written by a fellow monk, Walter Daniel, conversion is a deepening of piety and rededication to the struggle to commit to a Cistercian life of chastity, but it too lacks an overt polemical message. Aelred and Otloh are two of a large number of eleventh- and twelfth-century authors who characterize Christian spirituality as an ongoing conversion to piety and faith, yet they offer little in the way of reflection on non-Christians.⁵⁶

A slightly more ambiguous case is presented by Guibert of Nogent. In Guibert's chronicle of the Crusades, *Deeds of God through the Franks* (*Gesta Dei per Francos*), conversion as an exercise in piety and moral or spiritual reform is distinguished, both in focus and in use of vocabulary, from the baptism of Muslims or the apostasy of Christians.⁵⁷ At the same time, while his autobiographical memoirs do include many narrative elements similar to those found in polemical treatises—the circumstances of Guibert's propitious birth, the death of his father, prophetic dreams experienced by him and his mother—these elements are discussed apart from his clear hostility to Jews in

other sections of his memoirs and his other writing. Guibert's conversion to a monastic life of chastity plays little part in constructing his legitimacy as an anti-Jewish writer.⁵⁸ While in confessional works such as Guibert's, vocational autobiography functions primarily as a model of devotion and chastity, the narration of conversion in discussions with an overtly theological anti-Jewish or anti-Muslim agenda was, by contrast, a question of textual authority, not of biography.

It is in the context of this evolution that I wish to situate two of the best known medieval conversion accounts, those found in the opening to the *Dialogue against the Jews* by Moses/Petrus Alfonsi and the *Little Work on His Conversion* by Judah/Herman of Cologne.⁵⁹ In both of these—although they are very different, a fact I address in more detail below—the depiction of each author's conversion serves as an important means of establishing the very *auctoritas* of the arguments proffered within the text. Even more important, we can witness in these depictions the measurable shifts taking place within the Augustinian paradigm of conversion in the face of the growing tension between intrinsic worth and authenticity.

AS DELIGHTFUL AS THEY ARE AMAZING: THE NARRATIVES OF MOSES/PETRUS ALFONSI AND JUDAH/HERMAN OF COLOGNE

Judah/Herman's *Little Work* is one of the two best known Latin accounts of conversion in the twelfth century. It was preceded by a few decades by a very different work, one explicitly designed as an anti-Jewish treatise: the immensely popular *Dialogue against the Jews* by the convert Petrus Alfonsi, who claims he was known as Moses before his conversion in 1106 in the northern Iberian town of Huesca. In contrasting the two, we must appreciate that the *Dialogue* of Moses/Petrus is undoubtedly among the best known of any medieval polemic and survives in abundant manuscript copies.⁶⁰ It has been studied from a number of different critical perspectives, including as part of a burgeoning interest among Christian scholars in Islam (attacked in the fifth book), as the first Western work to refer to both the Talmud and the Qur'ān, and, most important, as part of an emerging discourse on rationality in twelfth-century apologetics.⁶¹ Similarly, it has been invoked, along with Judah/Herman's *Little Work*, as an indicator of the "mentalities" of apostates that "exemplified...different genera of medieval Jews who voluntarily converted to Christianity."⁶² Rather than setting out to read into his story the (admittedly fascinating)

experience of the historical author Moses/Petrus—known through fragmentary evidence for having brought Arabic books available in Iberia to the attention of scholars in England and France—or to see the drama represented in the text as somehow exemplifying a boilerplate drama of conversion or apostasy among twelfth-century intellectual Jews, I propose to read Moses/Petrus's narrative as part of the anti-Jewish rhetoric at work throughout the *Dialogue*, a sort of rhetorical keystone to his entire argument. Approached in this way, the text, like that of Judah/Herman, emerges as a vivid reflection of the unstable basis of authority in early twelfth-century writing, a critical point of transition in which the venerable Augustinian paradigm came up against new criteria of authenticity invoked on the basis of non-Christian sources.

The *Dialogue* is structured as a conversation between Petrus and Moses, the names given to the convert character and his dialogic partner, the Jewish alter ego, in fact the author's former self. In the first four books, Petrus proves to Moses the errors of Judaism and turns in book 5 to the errors of Islam. Books 6 through 12 offer an apologetic defense of basic Christian theological concepts such as the Trinity, the virginity of Mary, the incarnation and resurrection, and the harmony of Old and New Testaments. The *Dialogue* clearly reflects, in the discussion of these doctrines, the evolution of *auctoritas* toward a harmonization with *ratio* typical of twelfth-century theology. The authorial voice of the prologue, which quickly morphs into the voice of the fictional convert Petrus, explicitly identifies its intention and method as both offensive and defensive: "I set forth the destruction of the belief of all the other nations, after which I concluded that the Christian law is superior [*prestantiorem*] to all others. Moreover, last, I have set down all the objections of any adversary of the Christian law and, having set them down, have destroyed them with reason and authority according to my understanding."⁶³ In the first *Titulus*, Moses proposes to evaluate Jewish notions of God's physical form "by reason and argument," but Petrus rejects his very first claim along these lines by charging that he did not prove his point "by reason or by authority, but only by wishful thinking [*sola probatis (sic) voluntate*]."⁶⁴

Despite these pervasive appeals to *ratio et auctoritas*, the *Dialogue* goes beyond the simple expansion of the basis of authority into the realm of rational proof. Here the author enlarges the very canon of authorities beyond traditional biblical material in order to include an appeal to a wider corpus of non-Christian sources as well. As the first Latin Christian writer to refer in detail to the Talmud and rabbinical midrashim—the piecemeal references of Agobard of Lyons (d. 840) notwithstanding—he does repeatedly criticize and reject these texts, especially the aggadic portions (nonlegal rabbinical narratives and

exempla, anecdotes, and folklore) and exegetical midrashim, and he insults the rabbis by arguing that “their opinion” is “worthless.” Along these lines, in discussing one assertion about the “location” of God, he asks about the rabbinical position, “Who would not perceive how unworthy this [position] is of God, no matter how estranged they may be from knowledge of God?”⁶⁵ He dismisses rabbinical exegesis by arguing to Moses, “Your sages...have not known God as was necessary, and for this reason, explicating the sayings of the prophets in a superficial way, they erred against Him.”⁶⁶ In explaining one statement about the significance of the order of creation, he complains that “your sages” are opposed to it, despite the fact that it is a view that “the proof both of the arguments and of reason everywhere supports [*argumentorum et rationis undique fulcit probatio*].”⁶⁷

In these and other condemnations of rabbinical opinions, the author not only criticizes rabbinical writing from a general perspective, but directly impugns its *authoritative* status. As Petrus says to Moses, “The words of your sages seem to be nothing but the words of little boys making jokes in school [*verba iocantium in scolis puerorum*], or of women telling old wives’ tales in the streets [*nentium in plateis mulierum*]....[D]o you judge that the law of such men should be received or their authority approved? May divine mercy snatch [*eruat*] you away from their execrable precepts and counsels, just as it snatched [*eripuit*] me away.”⁶⁸ Numerous critics have argued that, in attacking these rabbinical sources, Moses/Petrus Alfonsi also inaugurates a new tradition in anti-Jewish writing by focusing greater attention on them. As the translator of the *Dialogues*, Irven Resnick, recently asserted, “In so doing, Alfonsi would transform Christian polemical tradition, marking his treatise as the most important such work to be written in a thousand years.”⁶⁹

Besides such attacks, however, there are occasional, seemingly sympathetic *appeals* to this literature as well, passages that invoke what “your sages attest” as proof of Christological claims.⁷⁰ Not only does Moses/Petrus, in his attack on Islam in book 5, introduce numerous allusions to the Qur’ān, including a statement he attributes to Muhammad affirming the “authority of the Qur’ān.” He is also, more problematically, led to appeal to the authority of rabbinical interpretation to support Christianity. In rejecting one of Moses’ explanations of the causes of the Diaspora after the destruction of the Second Temple, Petrus argues, “You will not be able to establish [*firmare*] this argument [*rationem*] with any authority,” and asserts that even “your sages” argue against such an idea.⁷¹ Petrus affirms that “the books of your doctrine attest in some way [*quemadmodum... testantur*]” that the Temple was to be destroyed under Titus. In his reading of Genesis 49:10, a *locus classicus* of theological argument,

Petrus affirms, “I will not explain this prophecy in any way other than your ancient sages explained it.”⁷² He even claims, “One of your sages...let it be understood that anyone, at any time, who will believe and obey the commands of Christ—to him the Son of God will come.”⁷³ After supporting his Christological statements with rabbinical (and not merely biblical) citations, he concludes, “I believe that I have revealed to you clearly and manifestly whatever I have proved by the authority of your books.” As Resnick explains, Alfonsi’s term for rabbinical writing, the “teaching of your sages [*doctrina doctorum vestrorum*]...carried with it an irrefutable sense of religious authority.” In his citations and those of later authors following Moses/Petrus’s model, the “authority [of the rabbinical sages] and, consequently, the authority of the Talmud were very much at stake.”⁷⁴

By now attacking rabbinical authority and now also appealing to it in support of his ideas—a portmanteau practice that would become much more conspicuous in later anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim writing—Moses/Petrus throws the meaning of *auctoritas* into flux. The strategic introduction of first-person voices (Petrus introduces Moses as a character within “*his* dialogue”) works from the very opening lines to control that flux by establishing a clear hierarchy of presence among converted and unconverted, present and former selves. On the other hand, however, Moses’ Jewish presence in Petrus’s story not only gives a voice to his defeated and rejected former self. It also actively frames and even defines Petrus’s Christian faith as it is expressed and defended there. Moses is named in the first sentence of the main body of the text and is the first to speak in all twelve chapters. It is through Moses’ prodding that the dialogue within the *Dialogue* comes to take place at all.

A key aspect of Moses’ active role in framing the work’s Christian contentions is his confusion and astonishment at Petrus’s conversion. Moses confesses, “I do not know nor do I see why you have changed and become estranged from the path of rectitude.” An indication of his surprise is the fact that Petrus used to embody the pinnacle of Jewish belief for his coreligionists: “I knew well that you used to excel [*valere*] in the writings of the prophets and the sayings of the sages, and that from your youth you were more zealous [*zelatorem*] for the law than all your contemporaries; that if there were any adversary, you opposed him with a shield of defense [*clipeum opposuisse*]; that you preached to the Jews in the synagogues, lest any withdraw from the faith; that you taught your companions; [and] that you led the learned to greater things.”⁷⁵ Petrus’s thorough *Jewishness*, his total former alterity, is the measure of the enormity of his transformation, and his expertise in his former faith empowers him to reject it. Just as his attack on Islam is justified by the fact that, as Moses says, “you

were always...associated with them and you were raised among them; you read [their] books, and you understand the language,” so his attack on Judaism is authorized by his former expertise.⁷⁶ As he boasts, “[The Jews] who had known me previously...had considered me well trained in the books of the prophets and the sayings of the sages.”⁷⁷

The fullness of this change from zealous Jew to faithful convert is further made manifest by the stark contrast between the closeness of the former friendship of Petrus and Moses and the charged tone of their reacquaintance. Even though Petrus says that, before his conversion, Moses had been a “most perfect friend [*perfectissimus... amicus*]” who “stuck by me” and “had been my companion and fellow student [*consocius fuerat et condiscipulus*] from the very earliest age,” their union is now sundered. Petrus’s distance from Judaism is first represented in his physical separation from Moses. Petrus cannot be found in the “place” of his former life, and so Moses can find him only by leaving that place too: when Petrus “abandoned the law [*relicta*] of [his] fathers,” Moses “came to [him] in haste, after having abandoned the place [*relicto*] of his residence.” Furthermore, Moses’ lamentation marks the loss of a former harmony: “Alas, Petrus Alfonsi, a great deal of time has passed since I have wanted, desperately, to come to you, to see you, to speak with you, and to be with you.” The former intimacy of friendship seems further wounded when Petrus describes how, “wearing the expression of an indignant man on his face [*quendam vultum ferens hominis indignantis*] as he approached and upbraiding [*increpans*] me, he greeted me not as a friend but as if I were a stranger.” The estranged Moses then “begs” Petrus for an explanation of his conversion in order “to dispel from [his] mind the anxiety of this doubt.”⁷⁸

This staged “anxiety” and fragmentation of friendship, which is deliberately written into the text by the author Moses/Petrus, dramatizes the larger uncertainty generated by the authorial expansion of a traditional Christian meaning of *auctoritas*. Therefore, the basis of the reconciliation of the characters Moses and Petrus, apart from their agreement to avoid “contention,” is their shared notion of authority. Moses proposes, “If you introduce some authority from the Scriptures, you choose to do this according to the Hebrew truth.... [I]f I adduce some [authority] for you according to the way we have it, I want you not to contradict it in any way but to receive it and to acknowledge it as true.” Petrus agrees, like Gregory of Tours, in order to “slay you with your own sword [*tuo namque ipsius gladio occidere te*].”⁷⁹ But what was simply affirmed by Gregory is actually requested by Moses and given in response by Petrus. In their agreement on authorities, the characters reaffirm the place of

auctoritas that had come into doubt since Gregory's time.

Beyond staging this consensus on textual sources, however, the dialogue itself dramatizes the reconciliation of the two authorial voices at work in the text, both the former expertise of Moses and the present faith of Petrus. As Seidman has eloquently argued, this reconciliation is a dramatic tool, "reconstituting conversion as a synchronic rather than diachronic process, in which Jewish and Christian selves coexisted in endless argument."⁸⁰ The framing of this opening exchange in the prologue is further framed by the author's *proemium*, in which these two personas, the Christian Petrus and the Jewish Moses, are united in one voice, that of "Petrus Alfonsi, an illustrious man" who became "a Catholic Christian from a Jew [*ex Iudeo catholici Christiani*]." ⁸¹ We are then offered within the text the "prologue by the same person" who speaks outside of the text, arguing "on his dialogue" rather than in it.

These very specific indications establish the omniscient voice of the story as that of the converted Petrus, and it is only through this voice that the reader can meet his fictive twin, Moses. The presence of the former Jewish self is evoked as part of the unified, omniscient narration of the Christian Petrus, positioning Moses *within* the wider frame of Petrus's anti-Jewish dialogue. While Moses is the first to speak in each chapter, Petrus is always the last, and from the very opening, the characters of the fictional dialogue are presented as mere aspects of the all-encompassing voice of the author that at the same instant functions to frame his arguments and define his identity. The implied unity of Petrus and Moses in the author—in which Moses is evoked but also subordinated within the Christian faith of Petrus—also signifies the supplanting of the Jewish covenant by the Christian one, the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scripture in the Christian revelation. The total inversion of the character of Moses and his transformation into that of Petrus, the stark contrast between Petrus's former life as a preacher to the Jews and an expert proponent of their faith, and his new identity as a "Catholic Christian," dramatizes the wider historical doctrine in which Judaism comes to exist as a static witness to Christian faith, still venerable but also now obsolete. As Jonathan Boyarin expresses it in reference to Alan of Lille, whose writing incorporated many of the innovations of earlier twelfth-century writers like Moses/Petrus, such structures of subordination were as much about alterity as identity: "Reducing difference to unity was thus a process of conversion, aimed simultaneously or sequentially at the non-Christian other and the unconverted Christian self."⁸² The anxiety over the rupture between the two halves of this identity—the old and the new, the Jewish and the Christian—is thus abated through the unification of both halves in the single author of

the *Dialogue*, both a former expert on Judaism and a present believer in Christ. Self, text, and history are aligned in decidedly Augustinian terms.

A similar appeal to former disbelief as an authentication of present faith is used in the *Little Work on His Conversion*, written a few decades after Moses/Petrus's *Dialogue*. On the most basic level, the *Little Work* recounts the gradual conversion of a Jew named Judah ben David of Cologne to Christianity in the late 1120s, when he was only in his early twenties. According to the text, Judah/Herman went from Cologne to Mainz for business (as he says, "all Jews are enserfed to commerce"), and while there, he gave an unsecured loan to Egbert, bishop of Münster.⁸³ Urged by family and friends to remain with the bishop until he paid back the loan, Judah/Herman claims he stayed as a guest in his house in Münster for nearly five months, during which time he learned about Christianity and was brought to debate and defend his ancestral faith against numerous Christians of various stations, even journeying with Egbert to the Augustinian house of canons in nearby Cappenberg. Although he returned to Cologne and was married, he underwent a spiritual crisis that eventually led him to be baptized, to leave behind his wife and family, and to enter the Premonstratensian order of Cappenberg. Although numerous attempts have been made to identify Judah/Herman and establish the relation between the *Little Work* and the mention of a *frater hebraeus* in the contemporary *Life of Godfried of Cappenberg*, all that is known of this story and its protagonist comes from the text itself.⁸⁴

Despite this lack of certain connection with any real person, the work can be linked with contemporary trends in Christian writing, above all in its understanding of *auctoritas*. In various places, Judah/Herman's characterization of authority is in keeping with the contemporary discursive process of harmonizing it with reason. Thus, when he first holds a disputation with the Benedictine theologian Rupert (d. 1129, abbot at the Benedictine Abbey in Deutz), he claims that Rupert promised to argue "both by reason and by authority of Scripture [*tam ratione quam scripturarum auctoritate*]." This stands in contrast to Judah/Herman's language to Rupert, in which he argues only "according to the authority of the Law [*iuxta legis auctoritatem*]" and claims, "Our righteousness, which is from the Law, is defended by insuperable authority against all your yapping [*contra omnes oblatrationes*]." ⁸⁵ Thus Judah/Herman makes a singular challenge to Rupert to yield to authorities or admit defeat: "Either set forth for me the authority for this abominable worship of yours, if you happen by some chance to know it, or, indeed, if you cannot do that, the logical consequence [is for you to] confess openly instead that you cannot, bearing the shame of this damnable error, which is entirely contrary

to the Law.”⁸⁶

In contrast to this singular focus on authority, Rupert’s answers “met all my objections both with the most beautiful arguments [of reason] and with the most valid authorities of Scripture.”⁸⁷ Judah/Herman even seems to equate, in words similar to those of Peter the Venerable, the following of reason with proof by authorities: “If [the Christians] could show me the authority of their sect from manifest testimonies of the Law and Prophets...I, yielding to reason, would take counsel for my salvation.”⁸⁸ While a connection between Peter and the author of the *Little Work* would seem impossible to establish, such echoes point to the shared process in these and other twelfth-century sources of reconceptualizing the parameters of authoritative proof. The progress of his conversion moves him from following only the authority of the law to a wider conception of the pleasing harmony and equality of authority and reason together: “Whatever things they had proven to me by plain reason and manifest authority I received with a grateful mind, and...I most diligently stored [them] up in the treasure chest of my heart [*in theca pectoris diligentissime recondebam*].”⁸⁹ Throughout the *Little Work*, authority operates in tandem with reason in a familiar fashion paradigmatic of the twelfth century.

There is, however, another critical sense in which authority functions in the text. A clue to the deeper ramifications of authority in Judah/Herman’s conversion, beyond simply the partnering with reason, comes at the very opening of his story. In the first chapter, Judah/Herman explains that when he was only thirteen, he dreamed of a white horse and a purse full of coins given to him by the Holy Roman emperor and German king Heinrich (Henry) V, and then of a dinner he enjoyed with his benefactor. When he awoke, he went to a relative of his named Isaac, “a man then of great authority among the Jews,” to ask for his interpretation. Isaac’s reading “made sense from the perspective of carnal happiness [*secundum carnis felicitatem*],” interpreting the stallion as a beautiful wife, the coins as great riches, and the feast as future honor among the Jews.⁹⁰ This dream in the first chapter, which Schmitt calls the “first and most important visionary experience on the path to conversion,” forms a parenthesis with the passage in the final chapter where Judah/Herman finally gives his own “correct” interpretation of the dream as a converted Christian. Isaac’s mistaken “carnal” interpretation sets the pretext for the hermeneutical journey from wrong to right interpretation over the course of the story.⁹¹ It is of critical importance that the arc of this journey “from darkness to light,” which constitutes the narrative backbone of the story, begins with an incorrect reading of the dream according to the flesh, an incorrect interpretation made by “a great

authority among the Jews.” As a child selected by God for future redemption but not yet exposed to any thinking beyond his ancestral tradition, he was unable to provide an authoritative interpretation, as he does at the end of the story. Thus, Isaac’s false interpretation is not only necessary for the meaning of Judah/Herman’s final clarity. It is also part of the meaningful web of adumbration and fulfillment in which the carnal Jew through his confusion and disbelief stands as witness for the spiritual Christian.

Isaac’s misprision provides the anchor for a continuing thread of standard *Adversus Iudaeos* discourse that runs throughout the work. The fact that Judah/Herman debated with Rupert of Deutz—an acerbic author of anti-Jewish tracts who condemned the “synagogue of Satan” and repeatedly characterized Jews as diabolical—situates Judah/Herman’s text within a familiar corpus of anti-Jewish writing.⁹² The association with polemic is not merely hinted at. Rather, the *Little Work* repeatedly invokes the conventional tropes, language, and imagery of the genre.⁹³ The Jews are “like beasts of burden, content with the letter of the precepts alone, as with chaff [while] Christians [are] like men using reason, refreshing [*reficerentur*] themselves with spiritual understanding as with the sweetest pith of the straw [*dulcissima palee medula*].”⁹⁴ Jews “were blinded by the darkness of their perfidy and malignity [*perfidie ac malignitatis sue tenebris excecati*].” Judah/Herman himself, as a Jew, “lacked spiritual hearing [*spirituali auditu*] [and] despised what [he] perceived with the corporal ear alone [*corporali solum aure*].”⁹⁵ But despite this, he was “mercifully snatched...from the most filthy and impious sect [*sordidissima...et nefandissima secta*] of Jewish superstition.”⁹⁶ The presence of such discourse throughout the text, *pace* the various affective readings focusing on Judah/Herman’s inner transformation, situates it more within the orbit of theological polemic than devotional piety. Such a reading is, moreover, in line with the many characteristics it shares with other, more recognizably disputational treatises framed by conversion narratives, including the *Dialogue of Moses/Petrus*.

Just as it provides a vehicle for Judah/Herman’s anti-Jewish rhetoric, this evocation of Isaac the Jew as an authoritative witness *manqué* also undergirds Judah/Herman’s hermeneutical conversion. Before he reveals his true interpretation of the dream, he tells a different dream he had as a catechumen awaiting his imminent baptism, in which Isaac himself appears with Nathan, another cousin of his. As Judah/Herman was joyfully contemplating the cross, his two Jewish relatives appeared, pacing back and forth, from which he inferred that they had been shown the truth but were now unable to enjoy it. Judah/Herman’s second dream becomes a portent of his

redemption and these hermeneutical Jews, embodiments of his former identity, are “confounded” by the prophecy’s “fulfillment” in him. Moreover, they also testify to that prophecy’s veracity, together affirming, “The things you remember have been proven true.” As they disappear “consigned to eternal hell,” Judah/Herman proclaims, “Scripture was fulfilled in them.”⁹⁷

The appearance of Isaac and Nathan just before his baptism provides the foil against which his transformation is enacted and forms part of his revelation, a presence at once conjured up and recalled at the same time it is conjured away in their disappearance and condemnation to hell.⁹⁸ Their double role as testifying witness and condemned defendant defines Judah/Herman’s former Jewishness and is an index of the fullness of his transformation from “other” into “self.” The sense of this movement—what Steven Kruger describes as “a *spectral* logic”—in which Judah/Herman’s former Jewish identity is stressed as part of the defining action of his profession of faith, appears in various parallel threads within the narrative.⁹⁹ Not only is this ironic inversion evident on the level of the story, in which Judah/Herman’s former community becomes a voice of prophecy, testifying to the very truth they manifestly reject. It is also evident on the level of literal textual *auctoritates*: as Rupert affirms to him, “There is an abundant supply of authorities out of your own books with which we can defend and confirm the truth of our religion.”¹⁰⁰

The most patent marker of this otherness, constantly evoked as an authentication device of the completeness of his transformation, is the repeated emphasis on the difficulty of his conversion. He was “not converted with...ease” but “with the greatest toil.” Even when Rupert refuted all of Judah/Herman’s arguments, the latter remained “like an adder, deaf and stopping up his ears” (Psalm 56:5), who did not listen “with the ears of the heart [*auribus cordis*]” and whose “mental eyes” were “darkened...by a cloud of Jewish blindness [*quos iudaice cecitatis caligo obduxerat*].”¹⁰¹ After admiring the piety of Bishop Egbert and his household, he says, “I began to argue within myself about these questions, as though I were arguing against God,” and in these struggles, “I endured in my heart the greatest battles of thoughts fighting among themselves.”¹⁰² Such struggles continued even up to his final renunciation of Judaism, when he misunderstood the ceremony and believed the clerics were mocking him as they repeatedly immersed him in the frigid waters of the baptistery. It is only after these and further trials, only after “the contagion of suspecting evil, that I had conceived, was cast out of my mind” and “the impure spirit was expelled from the house of my heart” that his transformation was complete and he could finally understand the true meaning of his childhood dream.¹⁰³

Judah/Herman's tale is thus "as delightful" as it is "amazing" because these struggles work as markers by which the completeness of his transformation from total otherness into an accepted self, from unbelieving Jew to first-person Christian author, is drawn and measured. Such a picture of Judah/Herman's character is, as Evelyn Vitz has noted about medieval hagiography, "*intensive*, not *extensive*," defined "not in the 'breadth' of the [hero's] humanity...but rather in the 'degree' of [his] *super*-humanity." His is not a portrait of psychological individuation but "vertical movement in relation to God," a symbolic "exaltation or abasement."¹⁰⁴ His conversion is thus defined by an irony of inversion: it was not through reason or disputation that he was transformed but through "the devout prayer of simple women," two nuns, Bertha and Glismut, who "with bowels full [*plene visceribus*] of all piety and compassion,...gushed forth abundant tears [*largas...lacrimas profundentes*] over my great miseries." Calling to mind the transformative tears of Monica for Augustine, who found himself irretrievably sunk in carnal love, Judah/Herman saw in their tears a fittingly ironic antidote to his mistaken marriage, chief among the "powerful waves of temptation" that bedeviled his conversion.¹⁰⁵ His words point back to Augustine's paradox of inversion with which this chapter began, in which "joy is always greater after greater affliction," a paradox instantiated most clearly in his characterization of the convert as an *auctoritas ad salutem*, a model for salvation by virtue of his ironic transformation.¹⁰⁶

This irony, what Morrison calls "the kerygmatic ironies of proportion built into the ideals of conversion," is matched by that of his total transformation from "a Jew of the Jews" into a Catholic priest, which requires proof based on his former authentic alterity.¹⁰⁷ Not only did he "know very well" the "custom of the Jews" because he was, as Solomon Halevi/Pablo de Santa María would later claim to be, "of the Israelite people and the tribe of Levi" and thus possessed a clerical legitimacy that authorized his arguments. Judah/Herman even "preached Christ in the synagogue of the Jews": "With many and valid authorities of divine preaching, I shut up their mouth which, in their blind pride and proud blindness, they had presumed to raise against heaven."¹⁰⁸

The radical inversion depicted in this scene is embodied in the imagined astonishment of the Jews themselves, astonishment that mirrors the initial reaction of Christians who looked "dumbfounded with amazement [*cum stupore intuentibus*]" on Judah/Herman's presence in church. He asks, "Can you imagine how great a stupor of amazement then seized all the Jews who were present when they saw me, the strongest assailant of their paternal traditions, while they had hoped that I, as a Jew of the Jews, would be their defender?"¹⁰⁹ As

Caroline Walker Bynum has noted in her examination of discussions of wonder (*admiratio*) in the twelfth century, clerical and devotional texts regularly oppose it to imitation (*imitatio*), and more generally, the knowable and the known. “We wonder at what we cannot in any sense incorporate, or consume, or encompass in our mental categories.”¹¹⁰ Wonder was a marker of alterity, of total otherness, and in the context of Judah/Herman’s narrative of transformation, the amazing nature of his story and the astonishment of his former friends serve as markers of his authenticity as a former Jew and of the radically ironic nature of his complete inversion in conversion.

As the ultimate model of this dramatic irony, patterned on the cosmic irony of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, Judah/Herman recalls the example of Saul/Paul in Acts who, despite “having received authority from the chief priests” and “persecuted Christ’s faithful with an insatiable cruelty,” was nevertheless “hurled to earth by a bolt of heavenly light.... [H]e was wonderfully changed from Saul into Paul, from wolf into lamb, from persecutor into preacher.”¹¹¹ Judah/Herman thus compares himself to the lost sheep of Jesus’ parable:

With what great outcries of praises [*preconiis*], with what great joys in common did not only the clergy but also the whole people celebrate...this return of the lost sheep carried on the shoulder of the pious Shepherd back to the holy Church’s flock.... How should the Christian people not rejoice over the penitence of a converted sinner, for whom, as the Lord bears witness, the hosts of angels rejoice more than over ninety and nine just persons? But the Jews, who have zeal for the law “but not according to knowledge,” inconsolably bewailed me, with a most bitter sorrow, as one perfidious and lost [*luctu me amarissimo...inconsolabiliter plangebant*].¹¹²

Like the return of the lost sheep, Judah/Herman’s conversion is all the more delightful because it is all the more amazing. Just as the prophecy of Jewish disbelief was “fulfilled” in the spectral figures of his cousins Isaac and Nathan, so now in Judah/Herman himself Scripture “was fulfilled by me [*impletum est a me*].”¹¹³ Like Saul/Paul, his transformation is one of total inversion, and his true conversion is also a thoroughgoing apostasy. Just as he was “rejoiced” over by Christians, he was bitterly “bewailed” by his former Jewish community. The extreme degree of his former alterity becomes the ultimate touchstone by which his authenticity is proven and his anti-Jewish voice is authorized.

Is the *Little Work*, then, an anti-Jewish polemic? Jean-Claude Schmitt has stated firmly that “the *Opusculum* does not refer to contemporary debates between Jews and Christians” and, more

important, that it cannot be limited to discussions of a history of Jewish-Christian relations. In agreeing with Schmitt, I must say that the *Little Work*, although it clearly draws directly from the rhetoric and arguments of polemical writing, is not itself a polemic like many of the other texts considered in this study. It is, rather, a foundational fiction whose carefully constructed story, that of the transformation of Judah into Herman, played a key role in articulating a hierarchy of local rivalries in which the Premonstratensian canons of Cappenberg took theological precedence over the Benedictine monks, symbolized by Abbot Rupert of Deutz.¹¹⁴ At the same time, although one of its goals may have been, as Schmitt suggests, to depict the figure of Herman as a sort of mythical founder of the Premonstratensian house of Cappenberg, the text worked to accomplish this goal by laying claim to Judah/Herman's authenticity as a converted Jew. In establishing that authenticity, the author was led to make use of a contemporary anti-Jewish discourse that was itself in the midst of a significant set of changes. Thus the *Little Work*, while not a conventional anti-Jewish treatise, nevertheless offers in its appropriation of that discourse a clear reflection of the important place of the narration of conversion as a rhetorical strategy of self-authentication.

This authentication achieved by the representation of Judah/Herman's conversion, however, is better understood as a reauthentication, a recuperation of the Augustinian ideal atop the shifting sands of *auctoritas*. The appeal to extrabiblical material as authoritative proof requires a new foundation for disputational authority. The sense of destabilization that appears in the *Dialogue* as Moses' "anxiety" and the rupture of a once intimate sodality can also be seen in Judah/Herman's *Little Work*, when the narrator comments on the shock that his conversion brought to his community. The shock made him "temper" his response out of fear by claiming he was only play-acting in order to train other Jews in disputation. "I wanted to transfigure myself into their persona [*in me volui transfigurare personam*]," he claims, so as to help Jews prepare for future disputations with hostile, proselytizing Christians.¹¹⁵ From the wider perspective of the sympathetic reader, the duplicity of this smaller, feigned "persona" conjured up by Judah/Herman serves oddly to measure the authenticity of the larger persona signified by the first-person authorial voice. In a rich moment of ironic reversal—a kind of narrative peripety—the falseness of the role he claims to play begins to blur the certain contours of the faithful transformation his text allegedly chronicles. It thus intimates that his final converted self too could be no more than a persona adopted for rhetorical reasons rather than affective ones. I will return to the implications of such internal

inconsistency in the fifth chapter, when I consider the self-contradictory rhetoric of the Castilian convert Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid.

A similar lacuna appears in Moses/Petrus's *Dialogue*. Although the entire dialogue is permeated with the paired concepts of *ratio* and *auctoritas*, there are a few glaring exceptions. Most important, at the very conclusion, when Moses concedes defeat before Petrus, he admits only, "You have confounded my objections with reason."¹¹⁶ He remains entirely silent about the power of the authorities presented by Petrus. This omission takes on greater significance in the fact that Moses does *not* convert at the end of the debate, leaving the friendship between Moses and Petrus—a symbol of the coherent faith of the author—permanently riven. In the face of this unbridgeable divide between selves—former and present, feigned and authentic—only the testimony of the author himself can bring textual coherence. It is only he, still an expert on the old but now also a believer in the new, who can realign the slippage of signification between text, self, and history that allows conversion to mirror the processes of both historical prophecy and exegetical typology.

In both the *Dialogue* and the *Little Work*, the struggles of the protagonists become the means by which the authenticity of their conversion is substantiated. Only by being both authentically other and fully familiar can their conversions take on a greater significance. In this state of paradox, they dramatize on an individual level the historical dynamic of abrogation in which one religion both obviates another religion and at the same moment carries that defeated other within itself as the foundation of its meaningfulness and truth. The difficulty, doubt, and delay of each narrative increase its drama, just as they do in Augustine's account. Judah/Herman's and Moses/Petrus's trials of conversion also transform each figure into something akin to an *auctor* of non-Christian sources, both authentically foreign but still intrinsically Christian.

Although contemporary authors themselves were not easily accepted as *auctores* before the thirteenth century—in Minnis's wry words, "the only good *auctor* was a dead one"¹¹⁷—the convert was, by comparison, one who had "stripped off the old self with its practices and...clothed [himself] with the new self" (Colossians 3:9–10) and who, in Saul/Paul's words, was "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). As Judah/Herman had "changed [his] life with [his] way of dress" and Moses/Petrus had "taken off the cloak of falsehood and the tunic of iniquity," each could present himself as both the living author who composed his text and the dead *auctor* whose *auctoritas* he drew upon to justify his arguments. His association with the otherness of the unconverted infidel and his

status as one faithful to the goals of Christian discourse made him the perfect spokesperson for the new *auctoritas* of polemical writing based on original sources. Like Saul/Paul himself, as both converter and converted, the new “living” man and the old “dead” one joined together in one body and in one textual continuum, he is at once the dead letter of literal exegesis and the living spirit of figurative allegory and anagogy, the *Hebraica Veritas* incarnate.¹¹⁸ With his dual identity, the convert is able to bridge the divide between the desire for authenticity and the need for intrinsic worth by bringing original Hebrew and Arabic authorities out of the shadows of radical difference back into a position of distant but manageable familiarity, both present and absent in the same discourse, both “conjured up” at the same time they are “conjured away.”¹¹⁹ The seismic release concomitant with the restoration of this Augustinian equilibrium through an allegorical representation of selfhood is evident in Judah/Herman’s final words in the *Little Work*, again evoking the parable of the lost sheep. Turning to the omniscient reader who can see both selves in a single arc of narrative unity, he exclaims, “You, whoever read or hear this account, rejoice and be glad with me, for I was dead, and came to life again. I was lost and have been found.”¹²⁰



In this chapter I have argued that the emergence of reason as a foundation of argumentative authority in Western Latin writing around the turn of the twelfth century marked the beginning of a destabilization of what constituted *auctoritas*, the value and authenticity by which an *auctor*, or proof text, was evaluated. In the face of this destabilization, the conversion story can be read as a response to this shift in the foundations of proof, serving to dramatize the larger argument of Christian supersession and also to authorize the author as an authentic expert in both his former and his newly adopted faith, a unified embodiment of both selfhood and otherness.

This particular use of conversion narratives is closely tied to the evolving needs of Christian apologetic discourse, and the question must now be asked if a similar use of conversion stories can be found in contemporary Jewish attacks on and defenses against such Christian affronts. It is to this question I turn in the next chapter, which focuses on sources representing conversion to Judaism.

CHAPTER 3

In the Shadow of the Khazars

Narrating Conversion to Judaism

Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change.

—FRANK KERMODE, *The Sense of an Ending*

Before turning to what I have identified as the second effect (after the narration of conversion) of the twelfth-century shift in *auctoritas*—an intensified focus on language as a marker of authenticity—I wish to turn away briefly from the subject of conversion to Christianity. Looking instead at the wider conceptual framework in which conversion operated, this chapter steps back chronologically to consider Latin and Hebrew accounts of Christian conversion to Judaism (or, from a Christian perspective, apostasy from Christianity) written up through the twelfth century. Such sources are relatively scarce and mostly fragmentary, but despite these formidable limitations they offer a fascinating glimpse into the form that such conversions could take from a non-Christian perspective. Even more important, they provide an illustrative counterpoint to familiar Christian works of the twelfth century considered in the last chapter. Their rarity and brevity further betoken the relatively minor place of conversion narratives within Jewish polemic or historiography and underscore the very nature of conversion itself—insofar as it is understood as a simultaneous turn of spiritual and social identity cast in narrativized terms—as a predominantly *Christian* theological category, one that was changed notably from its Hebrew Bible roots.

As a gateway into the texts written from a Jewish perspective, I first consider by way of contrast a few Latin examples that offer Christians' perspectives on the apostasy of their coreligionists. The first example of conversion to Judaism that I examine is that of Bodo, a deacon at the palace of Louis the Pious (Ludovicus, d. 840), who, according to Christian sources, professed Judaism in 838 and took the

SPEAKING WITH THE ENEMY: EPISTOLARY TRACES OF BODO/ELEAZAR AND WECELINUS

“Something very distressing happened, something to be bewailed by all the children of the Catholic Church.” So begins the following story of conversion found in the late Carolingian historiographical source, the *Annals of St. Bertin*, covering the middle of the ninth century:

Rumour spread the news and the Emperor found out that the deacon Bodo, an Aleman by birth and deeply imbued [*aliquatenus inbutum*] from his earliest childhood in the Christian religion with the scholarship of the court clergy with sacred and secular learning, a man who only the previous year had requested permission from the Emperor and Empress to go on pilgrimage to Rome and had been granted this permission and been loaded with gifts: this man, seduced by the enemy of the human race, had abandoned Christianity and converted to Judaism [*ad iudaismum sese conuertisse*]....[T]hus he was circumcised, let his hair and beard grow and adopted—or rather usurped—the name of Eleazar. He assumed a warrior’s gear, married a Jew’s daughter and forced his nephew, mentioned earlier, to convert to Judaism [*ad iudaismum translato*].¹

This is one of the few documents that survive concerning the life and conversion of Bodo/Eleazar. Significantly, this story—the most substantial representation of his conversion to survive—is not told by Bodo/Eleazar himself from his own perspective but from a Christian perspective by an anonymous Carolingian chronicler. Yet in this ninth-century account, told in the third person, the same tropes that appear in more developed form in first-person narratives of the twelfth century can already be discerned, only in inverted form. Although the text mentions that Bodo/Eleazar was “deeply imbued from his earliest childhood...with sacred and secular learning,” little is made of this fact. Rather than serving to authorize the convert as a source of expertise, it serves only to discredit him as one who was “seduced.” The text inverts all the markings used elsewhere to narrate an authentic Christian conversion—childhood exposure to faith, deep learning, a change of garb, appearance, and name, a baptism, a physical journey—and casts these as “perversions” and betrayals. The degree of his perversion is signaled as much by the fact that he converted after getting permission to go on pilgrimage as by the details of his postconversion appearance. Letting his hair and beard

grow and assuming a “warrior’s gear,” he becomes a wild menace against Christian belief, an inversion of a good and peaceful Christian, one who does violence to his former faith by forcing his nephew to apostatize. Although it reports a case of apostasy from Christianity, this version of Bodo/Eleazar’s story remains, not surprisingly, deeply Christian in its images and form.

Bodo/Eleazar is included on the short list of named Christians who became Jews in the Middle Ages not because of this or any other narrative rendition of his story but because, after his conversion/apostasy, he allegedly engaged, through a series of seven letters, in a theological dispute with the ninth-century Mozarabic author Paulus Alvarus of Cordoba, himself apparently of Jewish ancestry. While a few of Alvarus’s letters have been preserved, Bodo/Eleazar’s responses—or what are presented by Christian descriptions as his responses—exist in fragments that accompany their longer ripostes, giving only a confused echo of what his real arguments and their tenor may have been. Bodo/Eleazar’s only “voice” outside of these few sentences is that constructed by Christian historiographical memory.

Alvarus’s language resembles other ninth-century apologetic sources in his rejection of the “support of academics [*favorem academicorum*]” and the philosophical (“Athenian”) style (*colorem de Atheneo*) and claims instead that his letter “smacks of prophetic flavor [*prophetarum saporibus redolet*].”² His assertions stand entirely on the foundation of prophetic *testimonia* drawn from Scripture, and he invites Bodo/Eleazar to give proofs for his rejection of these claims. Although his response to Alvarus’s first letter is truncated after only the first few lines, Alvarus’s response to this in turn provides a sense of its contents, which seem to consist entirely of Scriptural proofs mixed with acerbic criticism. Richard Fletcher has pointed out that the letters take a curious turn from apparent cordiality (Alvarus directs his first address to “my dear” Eleazar, who responds by calling Alvarus a “good man”) to mordant hostility (Bodo/Eleazar becomes an “enemy of God” and all pleasantries are dropped, especially after he seems to have insulted Jesus and Mary, provoking Alvarus’s vituperation).³ Little by little the appeals themselves recede to make room for the gush of insults and rhetorical contumely that characterize the final letters. While Bodo/Eleazar calls his opponent’s words the “barking of mad dogs [*canum ravidorum...latratibus*],” Alvarus calls him nothing more than a “wailing fox [*uulpeum gannientem*],” one whose “foul letter” is “full of lies, rotten with insults [*confecta mendacio, contumeliis fetidam tuam cenerosam (sic) epistolam*].”⁴

The content of the debate is drawn directly from standard anti-Jewish discourse—discussion of Genesis 49:10, chronology of the world based on Daniel, disbelief that God would subject himself to the

lowly body of a woman in childbirth, and so on—and theology and exegesis constitute the nub of the exchange, while little attention is paid by Alvarus to Bodo/Eleazar’s personal experience. Conversion here is a fact of allegiance, not a narrative of transformation, and, insofar as Bodo/Eleazar’s letters can be inferred from Alvarus’s ripostes, the manner in which the interlocutors characterize their faith follows no trajectory of evolution. Alvarus, however, does repeatedly attempt to undermine Bodo/Eleazar’s legitimacy by attacking his inferior status as a convert. In his second letter, for example, Alvarus rejects his assertions about the meaning of various Hebrew words by branding him an upstart whose status as a convert implies a lack of authentic knowledge of his new religion or its language. “Why has this objection, for this interval of so many years, not been raised to us [by Jewish authorities]?...Unless perhaps [it is because] you, a Gallic man [*homo Gallus*], have understood what the chiefs of the synagogue have not known up to now, and a Latin can find in Hebrew writing what a Hebrew did not.”⁵ By emphasizing that he is a “Gallic man” and a “Latin” rather than a “Hebrew” man, Alvarus suggests that Bodo/Eleazar’s conversion is inauthentic or ineffectual because it is limited by his Gentile nature. Bodo/Eleazar’s answer, in turn, affirms faith in the law of Moses, not racial identity or knowledge, as the central defining characteristic of his new persona: “See then how I have confirmed my law as completely true [*meam confirmaui legem uerissime*] [and] I have vowed to remain steadfastly faithful [*sedulum...consistere*] in the law of the Lord.”⁶

Alvarus’s third letter, his longest, takes umbrage at what he sees as Bodo/Eleazar’s stolid self-assuredness. He goes beyond his earlier *ad hominem* attacks and invokes his status as a child of Jewish ancestors as a foundation of authority:

I glory in that all that you presume was written for you [about Israel] was said for me.... Who is more worthy of bearing the name Israel? You, who as you say, turned back [*reuersus*] from idolatry to the cult of the supreme God and who are a Jew not by nation but by faith? Or I, who am a Hebrew by nation and faith [*et fide et gente hebreus sum*]? For this reason, I do not call myself “Jew,” because “a new name” was given “that was named by the mouth of the Lord” [Isaiah 62:2]. Surely, Abraham is my father, because my ancestors descended from [his] very lineage. Those who awaited the Messiah who was to come and received him when he came, they seem more Israel than those who awaited him but rejected him when he came but nevertheless continue to await him.... But the people who turned back to the faith of Israel insert themselves every day in the nation of God, just as it seems you adhered to the error of the Jews.⁷

Tellingly, it is the Christian Alvarus and not Bodo/Eleazar who understands conversion as a question of identity and authority and not simply one of faith and action. By pointing to his own ancestry, he suggests that conversion to Judaism is not possible because it implies as much an arrogation of ancestry as it does a proclamation of faith. Alvarus's claim against Bodo/Eleazar is based on inversion. Although the latter "presume[s]" prophecy was "written for" him, it was actually "said for" Alvarus. Although Bodo/Eleazar has appropriated the name of Israel, it is Alvarus, who has rejected the name in affirming his Christian identity, who is more "authentically" Jewish. In patently Pauline terms, Alvarus rejects Bodo/Eleazar's claim to have "turn[ed] back from idolatry to the cult of the supreme God" by casting conversion as a departure from the old while claiming that the profession of Judaism can only be a "reversion" to an obsolete way of thinking. Similar to the historiographical tale of Bodo/Eleazar's life, Alvarus's argument against him disauthenticates and de-authorizes Bodo/Eleazar by inverting his conversion into an abnormal and regressive path of perversion, one marked at every turn by the stinging irony of Christian supersessionist theology.

The letters between Bodo/Eleazar and Alvarus offer a glimpse of the meaning of conversion to Judaism from a medieval Christian perspective, but the sources offer little in the way of personal testimony. Bodo/Eleazar's converted status and interpretive authority seem to be only Christian concerns, and the simple narrative elaboration of his transformation stands in sharp contrast to the total absence of story and symbol in Bodo/Eleazar's fragmentary discourse. A similar example of Jewish conversion, in which the new Jew exists principally as a character within the frame of a larger Christian textual imagination, survives from the early Ottonian account of Wecelinus from ca. 1005. Like the letters of Bodo/Eleazar and Paulus Alvarus, the words of Wecelinus survive only as a small part included within a larger Christian text, in this case the *De Diversitate Temporum* of the Benedictine chronicler Alpertus of Metz (Alpertus Mettensis, d. 1024).⁸ Little is known about Wecelinus, except that he was a clerk of Duke Konrad I of Carinthia (modern-day southern Austria and northern Slovenia) who wrote an incendiary letter to and received a reply from a certain Heinrichus, court cleric of King Heinrichs II. Both the letter attributed to Wecelinus and the response attributed to the cleric Heinrichus come framed by the introductory remarks of Alpertus, and like the case of Bodo/Eleazar, Wecelinus's conversion exists as such only within a fictional Christian construction.

Although Wecelinus's brief remarks preserved by Alpertus contain no reference to his conversion and offer only barbs based on Scriptural authorities, Alpertus himself sets up the tone of the exchange in

dramatic, narrative terms: “Now in those days, that is to say when Heinrichs, who later was consecrated emperor by the pope, was king, a certain Wecelinus, formerly a clerk of Duke Konrad, was led astray by a fiendish delusion and went over to the false doctrine of the Jews [*illusionem diabolicam seductus errori Iudeorum consensit*].”⁹ Alpertus locates Wecelinus’s “fiendish delusion” in historical time, “in those days,” the specific time when Heinrichs, “who was later consecrated,” was king. He thus incorporates Wecelinus’s apostasy into a historiographical structure, an event in the history of the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire. This temporalization is also a textualization, generating the following story as well as Alpertus’s commentary: “When the king heard of this he was justly seized by a great rage and at his order one of his court clerics, named Heinrichus, even as the king, completely refuted the false words the above-mentioned apostate had uttered against Christ and His saints, by means of the most veracious testimonies of Holy Scripture.”¹⁰ The conversion is a textualized event that provokes other dramatized consequences, giving rise to the work written in response, yet it is this same work that preserves and frames the conversion itself. While the Jewish voice of Wecelinus has no independent agency in the story itself—in what is preserved, Wecelinus does not relate his conversion but merely launches into an attack as his unambiguous enemy—that same voice becomes part of a narrative thread in which Wecelinus’s tergiversation is a necessary condition of Heinrichus’s and Alpertus’s textual apologia. When Wecelinus’s words are introduced as *Scripta ipsius apostatae*, they already exist within a scripted web of the Christian polemical imagination.

Wecelinus’s conversion gives rise to Heinrichus’s discussion, written at the request of the king, and it also contributes to Alpertus’s text. Although Alpertus preserves only a few brief remarks of Wecelinus, the Christian frame of *De Diversitate Temporum* stretches this apostasy across most of its contents. Alpertus’s first mention of Wecelinus comes in the seventh chapter of part 1, where he states, “We have decided to place [Wecelinus’s and Heinrichus’s debate] at the end of this little book.”¹¹ At the end of the second part, Alpertus recalls his earlier promise: “Above I have promised to tell of that apostate who abandoned clerical orders and fell into the bottomless pit [*voraginem*] of the perfidious Jews.” Alpertus’s work sits between this deferral and return, and thus Wecelinus’s conversion has a structure of both narrative prolepsis and analepsis, anticipation and memory, as well as an exegetical foretelling and fulfillment. Alpertus even refers to this return to Wecelinus as a “fulfillment” of his earlier “promise” at the same time as he underscores the tension of his story: “But now that I must fulfill my promise I quake from head to toe; it makes my hair

stand on end and I tremble with fear that the devil was able to persuade a man to dare to fling [*iactasse*] such dirt at Christ and His saints. For this wretched creature [*infelicissimus ille*] had written the following pernicious letter.”¹² Alpertus’s introduction and later return thus mirror, on the level of the narrative frame, the structure of attack and response provided by Wecelinus’s and Heinricus’s letters. Just as in the exchange between Bodo/Eleazar and Paulus Alvarus, conversion to Judaism here exists within a Christian conceptual frame.

SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE SOUTH: PROSELYTES FROM THE CAIRO GENIZAH

We can use these Christian works representing conversion to Judaism as foils to understand other, very different Jewish texts in Hebrew, most of which consist of fragments dating from the tenth and eleventh centuries. Unlike the Christian, Latin sources, these contemporary Hebrew writings drew on an established tradition traceable to early rabbinical literature and even before, to biblical accounts about Gentiles professing faith in the God of Israel or the incorporation of Gentiles into the Israelite community through marriage or conversion. While the story of Ruth may be the most recognizable, and those about Rahab, a prostitute of Jericho, and Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, were also extremely popular in rabbinical literature, the story of Abraham itself can be taken as the prototype of a turning to monotheistic belief, insofar as it depicts his departure from Haran to the land of Canaan and, in rabbinical tradition (e.g., Genesis Rabbah 38), his abandonment of his father’s idols.¹³

Notwithstanding the core image of faith as a departure from sin and adherence to the covenant with God, the more predominant theme underlying discussion of religious change in both biblical and rabbinical literature is the distinction between Israelite/alien and pure/impure.¹⁴ As Gary Porton has shown, early rabbinical characterizations of conversion, frequently made in terms of the biblical figure of Obadiah (in rabbinical sources supposed to have been a converted Edomite; e.g., BT Sanhedrin 39b), work constantly to negotiate the persistent tension between the distinct but related questions of religious adherence and ethnic identity. This tension is manifest in the divergent positions about how to treat and understand converts to Judaism. The ongoing challenge to the early rabbis was to preserve the uniqueness of Israel’s status as God’s chosen people without denying the faith shown to Israel’s God by new converts.¹⁵ The rabbinical opposition between views of converts (*gerim*) as “fully Israelites” and yet also as “sores” on Israel (BT Yebamot 47b) that

“delay the coming of the Messiah” (BT Niddah 13b) is paradigmatic of this enduring tension.

This tension is reflected in the varied terminology with which conversion and converts are described in Hebrew writing. A fundamental distinction is made between those of no Jewish background who profess faith in the Jewish God and join the Jewish community, and those of Jewish background who renew or deepen their faith. The former category is based on the concept of the *ger*, or stranger/sojourner, who comes to live or take refuge among Israelites. The Torah repeatedly demands kindness and hospitality to the *ger*, as in Leviticus 19:34, which requires that “the stranger that resides among you [*ha-ger ha-gar itkhem*]” shall be “as one native-born among you [*ke-ezrah mikem*]” (also Exodus 12:49; Leviticus 24:22). This biblical admonition to “love the stranger,” as well as a later rabbinical teaching to show justice and equality to the “righteous stranger” (*ger zedek*) and the “resident alien” (*ger toshav*), is based on the remembrance of the plight of the Israelites themselves, “for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:19; Leviticus 19:34). As the concept of the *ger* was a euphemism for those who adopted Jewish customs and belief, so *giyyur* (“becoming a resident *ger*,” something like “auxiliary membership”) came near the end of the Second Temple period and especially in later rabbinical thought to denote conversion to Judaism from without. Such exogenous conversion was also frequently denoted in rabbinical texts by the phrase “to take refuge under the wings of the Divine Presence [*lah̄sot taḥat kanfei ha-shekhinah*].”¹⁶ In contrast to these terms, repentance by those of Jewish background (usually for a specific infraction) is denoted as *teshuvah* (lit. “answer,” from *shuv*, “to return”; e.g.; 1 Kings 8:47–48), later expressed as a “return in repentance” (*ḥazrah bi-teshuvah*), and one who repents is named a *ba’al teshuvah* (or *ḥozer be-teshuvah*) (e.g., BT Berakhot 34b). In a complex evolution of terminology, the word *conversion* (and its source, Lat. *convertō*), which acquired its primary theological meaning as an expansion of the biblical notion of *shuv*, has come to refer broadly both to a return to God in repentance but also to *giyyur*, the conversion (lit. “becoming-a-ger”) of non-Jews upon accepting Jewish belief and custom. Nevertheless, the lack of a single term in rabbinical Hebrew writing to encompass these two disparate senses—a disparity not evident, by contrast, in terminology for apostasy, which expresses a unified perspective—further points to the pervasive distinction, one can even say disjunction, between belief and identity among certain rabbinical writers who discuss these concepts.¹⁷

This problem also led to opposed views within rabbinical and medieval sources about the possibility and meaning of conversion to

Judaism. As Menachem Kellner has succinctly argued, the question of how ethnic or spiritual identity related to belief and action can be expressed in broader philosophical terms as a struggle between essentialist (or particularist) and universalist views of Jewish identity. Among those thinkers subscribing to a more Platonic, essentialist view of Judaism, Jews are born, not made. Much of medieval Midrash as well as thinkers such as Sa'adya Ga'on, Judah Halevi, and the author of the *Zohar* all tended to support an essentialist view of Jewish identity according to which it was extremely difficult, even impossible, to "become" a Jew, and converted Gentiles were spiritually inferior to natural-born Jews. In philosophical terms, Gentiles could become Jews accidentally, never essentially.¹⁸ Maimonides, by contrast, defended a universalist view in which former Gentiles could indeed convert and would be spiritually equal to natural-born Jews. In eschatological terms, Maimonides argued (in both his philosophical and his religious, halakhic writing) that Jews and Gentiles would be indistinguishable (both spiritually and legally) in the world to come, while some essentialist thinkers maintained that the distinction between Jew and Gentile would remain forever, even among righteous converts. Although Maimonides' ideas on all of the different questions impacted by this debate—the distinction between Jew and Gentile in the afterlife, the meaning of Israel, the equality of converts and nonconverts—were widely influential, they did not reflect a universal opinion. Beginning with early rabbinical writers and continuing among medieval Jewish thinkers, there was an ongoing tension between an essentialist and a universalist view of proselytism and conversion. Among some prominent Jewish thinkers such as Halevi, this had important consequences for the representation of conversion in apologetic sources.¹⁹ Most important for our purposes here, this tension between views about conversion only infrequently gave way to the *narration* of conversion as a process that reflected a Jewish view of redemption history in opposition to Christian and Muslim views. Perhaps because the meaning of conversion to Judaism was not always clear in medieval sources, conversion was not used to symbolize Jewish ideas of salvation history as often as it was in Christian texts.

Traces of the debate between universalist and essentialist views are discernible in a few medieval sources documenting conversions to Judaism, especially those that have been preserved in the Cairo Genizah, a vast collection of material stored over many centuries in the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fustat, Old Cairo. Excavated in the late nineteenth century and still an ongoing font of discoveries and revelations, the Genizah provides an unparalleled hoard of documents that shed light on many aspects of Jewish life and thought in the

eastern Mediterranean, especially between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries. Among its treasures are documents relating to converts to Judaism, many dating from the eleventh century. The sources offer a series of fascinating but fragmentary snapshots of real and fictional converts and their narratives of migration and hardship occasioned by their change of faith. One short document, for example, which Norman Golb has argued might refer to Wecelinus, consists of a letter written by one Samuel ben Isaac ha-Sefardita on behalf of a proselyte who, having been “persecuted” by Christians following his conversion, fled to Damascus, Jerusalem, and finally to Cairo.²⁰ Another speaks of a Christian woman who “left the house of her father” and adopted Judaism, marrying a Jewish man named David from Narbonne (probably kin to the eleventh-century Rabbi Nasi Todros I of Narbonne). Having fled with her family to the town of Monieux, in southeastern France, her husband was killed in an anti-Jewish uprising and two of her three children, one a girl only three years old, were taken from her along with her husband’s possessions. The document describes her presence in Cairo with no money and a child of only a few months, and asks for money to support her and pay a ransom for her two captive children. Genizah documents preserve various similar short anecdotes and oblique references, all of varying pathos, only some of which have been edited.²¹

Among the most valuable of such documents describing conversions to Judaism are those shedding light on the historical foundations for the myth of the mass conversion of the Khazars, a seminomadic Turkic group that flourished in the Pontic-Caspian steppe north and northeast of the Black Sea between the seventh and ninth centuries. Traditionally, the people practiced a form of shamanism entailing worship of land and sky, but a portion of the upper nobility and royalty under the reign of King Bulan (late eighth or early ninth century) abandoned their ancestral beliefs and adopted Judaism. While historiographical and archaeological evidence does not make it clear how extensive this conversion was or what impact it had on religious beliefs among the majority of Khazars—theories range from claims of widespread conversion at all levels of society to claims of limited conversions among only the highest social classes—the legend born of these events penetrated western Jewish understanding and came to constitute a central myth of conversion to Judaism among Mediterranean Jews in the tenth century to the twelfth and beyond.

Two key Genizah documents shed light on the legend of the Khazar conversion to Judaism, both of which describe the events in narrative form, albeit a skeletal one. The first document, the “Khazar Correspondence,” consists of two tenth-century letters between a

Khazar named Joseph and the Cordoban grandee Hasdai ibn Shaprut (d. ca. 975). Leaving aside questions of the factual authenticity of these texts, we can approach them in terms of their dramatization of conversion and view them, in Omeljan Pritsak's words, as "epic narratives" whose function is to convey myths of identity through the form of a vignette.²² Both letters describe the Khazar conversion in mythic terms relating to the settling of the land and the purification of religion by King Bulan, who "expelled the wizards and idolaters [et *ha-qosmim ve-et 'ovdei 'avodah zarah*] from the land."²³ As Bulan's fame spread, both the Byzantine Christians and the Muslims sent envoys to him "with the object of converting him [*le-haṭoto*] to their own religion."²⁴ The king then decided to hold a debate between a Christian, a Muslim, and a Jew to determine the true religion. The three debated without arriving at any conclusion, so the king intervened to ask both the Christian priest and the Muslim jurist which religion, after their own, is preferable. When both Christian and Muslim replied in favor of Judaism, the king replied, "Both of you admitted with your own lips that the religion of the Israelites is the best and truest [*ha-ṭov ve-ha-yashar*]. Therefore, I have chosen the religion of the Israelites, that is, the religion of Abraham.... From that time on the Almighty God helped him and strengthened him. He and his slaves circumcised themselves and he sent for and brought wise men of Israel who interpreted the Torah for him and arranged the precepts in order and up to this very day we [have been subject] to the honorable and true religion."²⁵ In this anecdote, Bulan's conversion is a matter of proof and ceremony, not individual belief or inner struggle. His declaration of allegiance and circumcision precede his education or interpretation. The text underscores further the social nature of Bulan's turn by casting it as the beginning of a movement that spread out to those around him and eventually to "all his people" all the way "up to this very day." While the conversion scene, premised on the story of Abraham's circumcision, is a foundational fiction of a people, Bulan's metonymic symbolizing of all the Khazars does not incorporate a parallel theological dimension but merely gives the ordered chronology of a social development.

An equally ordered and chronological but also more symbolic portrait is found in a second account of the Khazar conversion known as the Schechter letter, a fragment named after Solomon Schechter, the founder of Genizah studies who is responsible for excavating and transporting the largest trove of the documents from Cairo to Cambridge. Like the Khazar Correspondence, the Schechter letter derives from an exchange of letters in which a Khazar author describes the origins of his people to an inquiring but benevolent, ostensibly Jewish outsider. No mention is made of Bulan by name but

only of a “prince” who came to adopt Jewish belief following the model of a Jewish leader of the Khazar army:

There was [at the time] no king in the land of Qazaria; but rather whoever would achieve victories in war would they appoint over themselves as chief officer of the army. [Thus it was] until...a certain Jew prevailed with his sword [*gavar yehudi eḥad be-ḥarbo*] and put to flight the enemies come against Qazar. So the men of Qazar appointed him over them as chief officer of the army according to the ancient custom. They remained in this state of affairs for many days, until the Lord took mercy and stirred the heart of the chief officer to return [*teshuvah*] [to God]; for his wife, whose name was Serah, influenced him [lit. “turned him”] and taught him successfully; and he too agreed, since he was circumcised.²⁶

Upon this “turn,” Christian and Muslim sages (from “Greece” and “Arabia”) were, as in the Khazar Correspondence, sent to debate the true religion, again ending with the final victory of Jewish law. What is noteworthy about this fragmentary account is the narrative arc leading from a former state of kinglessness to one of Jewish leadership. The transformation of the people is reflected in the transformation of the leader, prompted by the Lord’s merciful decision to “stir” his “heart...to return” (i.e., to repent). In contrast to the Khazar Correspondence—and much more similar to the Christian texts of the twelfth century considered in the previous chapter—the decision of the whole community to adopt Judaism (from without) mirrors the internal “turn of heart” of one chosen figure who was already Jewish. Interestingly, this Jew’s repentant turn was prompted by a woman. “For his wife...influenced him and taught him profitably.” After the Jews successfully explain the Torah and win the debate against Christians and Muslims, “Israel returned [*yashuvu yisra’el*] with the people of Qazaria [to Judaism] in complete repentance [*bi-teshuvah shelemah*].”²⁷ Here the conversion to Judaism of the non-Jewish Khazars comes about not through *giyyur*, as would be expected for non-Jews, but through *teshuvah*, following the model of the natural-born Jew who “returned” to God in repentance.

Despite their brevity, these two Genizah letters characterizing the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism present an interesting contrast to the letters alleged to be from converts to Judaism (Bodo/Eleazar and Wecelinus) found in Christian sources. In these Khazar texts, conversion does seem to follow a story line, but one largely devoid of explicit polemical statements, even in the context of a comparative debate among the three Abrahamic religions. In those of Bodo/Eleazar and Wecelinus, by contrast, conversion constitutes a simple condition

of a larger polemical argument. These two disparate strands of conversion narrative and argumentative voice are fused in the twelfth-century rendition of the Khazar myth by the Iberian poet Judah Halevi (d. 1141), which immediately became the predominant characterization of Khazar conversion.²⁸ Halevi finished his Judeo-Arabic *Book of Refutation and Proof in Defense of the Despised Faith* (*Kitāb al-radd wa-l-dalīl fī al-dīn al-dhalīl*) between 1130 and 1140, within a few decades of the compositions by both Moses/Petrus Alfonsi and Judah/Herman of Cologne. His text follows the brief mention of the Khazar conversion by various Muslim writers, including the brief anecdote given by the Andalusī Muslim al-Bakrī (d. ca. 1094).²⁹ Better known by the title of its twelfth-century Hebrew translation by Judah Ibn Tibbon, *The Book of the Khazars* (*Sefer ha-Kuzari*), the work exemplifies a new twelfth-century scheme that melds the story of the Khazar people with an overt apologetic agenda.

Halevi's opus dramatizes the alleged debate between wise men of the three faiths standing before the king of the Khazars, and thus most of its content consists of philosophical defenses and proofs. The story opens with an explicitly confrontational premise. Halevi states, "I was asked if I had arguments against the philosophers and followers of [other] religions, and also against [Jewish] sectarians who attacked the people [of Israel]."³⁰ The stress is placed on a rational defense of Judaism. Woven into this, however, are narrative elements dramatizing the Khazar king's search for truth and final conversion to Judaism. The premise that underlies the opening question naturally evolves into a tale of conversion that serves as the framing device of the whole text: "This reminded me of something I had heard about the arguments of an authority [rabbi] who was with the King of the Khazars, the convert to the religion of the Jews.... [T]o [the king] came a dream, and [it appeared] as if an angel addressed him, saying: 'Your way of thinking is indeed pleasing to the Creator, but your way of acting is not pleasing.'" Although the king tried to heed the angel's admonition and became more zealous in his religion, performing "sacrifices" with a "perfect heart," the angel returned and repeated the same words, causing him "to ponder" different religions "and finally to become Jewish [*tahawwada*] together with many other Khazars." The author explains, "I resolved to write down that argumentation [*al-iẖtijāj*] as it occurred [*ka-mā waqa'a*]."³¹

After his dreams, the king consulted a philosopher, a Christian, a Muslim, and a Jew to learn their understanding of truth. As Daniel Lasker has observed, the belief in a prophetic meaning of the dream goes hand-in-hand with the king's rejection of purely philosophical answers to his search for truth. Rejecting the philosopher, the king pursues the meaning of his dreams as the key to his salvation.³² A

second frame thus opens with the second part of the work in which the king “was anxious to reveal to his vizier...the secret of his dream [*sirr manāmihi*] and its repetition.” With his vizier, he set out on a trip to some “deserted mountains” near the sea. After arriving at a cave in which “some Jews used to celebrate the Sabbath,” they met with the Jews there and converted to Judaism: “They [two] disclosed their identity to them, entered their religion [*dakhalā fī dīnihim*], were circumcised in the cave, and then returned to their country, eager to learn the Jewish law. They kept their conviction [*i’tiqād*] secret, however, until they found an opportunity of disclosing the fact gradually to a few of their special friends. When the number had increased, they made the affair public, and induced the rest of the Khazars to embrace the Jewish faith.”³³ The questions and answers that follow make up the text of the *Kuzari* itself. The narration of the king’s conversion follows various threads of development at once—from uncertainty to revelation, incorrect to correct action, private to public disclosure, ignorance to understanding—all of which provide the structure for Halevi’s work and also fuse the strands of the conversion narrative into a single myth of identity.

Numerous clues make it clear that the conversion of the Khazar king in the text is a means to attack Christianity and Islam and also a vehicle for the apologetic defense of Judaism before all other religions. As Lasker has shown, the Khazar king, despite his conversion, never fully identifies with the Jewish people. He does not seem to be in exile, does not describe himself as a full member of the Jewish people, and shows he has a different attitude toward the land of Israel than the Jewish rabbi who teaches him. In fact, the rabbi tells him plainly, “Someone who enters the religion of Israel will not be equal to the native-born [*al-ṣarīḥ*], lit. ‘unmixed’ or ‘purebred’], for only the native-born can achieve prophecy.”³⁴ As Lasker explains, “The fact of the inequality of native-born and converted Jews is thus stated in theory and then exemplified by the conversion story.” According to this understanding, which Halevi seems to support as much in the *Kuzari* as in his poetry, proselytes to Judaism such as the Khazar king are only “imitations” of real, native-born Jews, just as Christianity and Islam are only “imitations” of real, native-born Judaism.³⁵ Although being a proselyte is better by degree than being Muslim or Christian, it is still not the same as being a native-born Jew. The king’s choice to accept a second-class status in Judaism rather than a higher status in Christianity or Islam signifies Halevi’s means of combining his rejection of these religions with his view on converts within Judaism. The converted Khazar king symbolizes the future salvation of all those who adopt Jewish law and affirms the superior place of Jews within that cosmic scheme. The tale of conversion in the

Kuzari thus reflects Jewish notions of sacred history, but its form and logic are naturally very different from a retrospective Augustinian model of conversion. Halevi constructs a historical image of Judaism as superior without recourse to supersessionism, and he rejects figural reading in favor of plain literal reading and, above all, obedience to God through action.³⁶

The *Kuzari* of Judah Halevi is a clear example of how legends of conversion to Judaism preserved in Genizah documents, many of which have a vague dramatic structure but no preponderate polemical imperative, could be transformed through a more elaborate story to provide the frame for apologetic argumentation. The use of conversion to reflect notions of sacred history in comparison with rival models is, apart from Halevi's portrayal of the Khazars, relatively rare in these sources. As the numerous Genizah fragments mentioning Jewish proselytes attest, the representation of conversion to Judaism was not universally a narrative or a polemical venture. Indeed, many texts containing attacks, even those written by converts, were not accompanied by a discussion of conversion. One prominent example is found in the Arabic philosophical disquisition *Twenty Chapters* (*ʿIshrūn Maqāla*), surviving partly in Genizah fragments, by Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammis, a ninth-century Jew from Syria or northern Iraq who apparently converted to Christianity and then *reverted* to Judaism. Little is known of his biography and he himself makes no mention of his faith, conversion, or reversion, even though some of his philosophical claims are directed against Christian beliefs.³⁷

Nevertheless, a few other Genizah fragments do provide examples of the staging of conversion employing a combination of disputational and narrative voices. One such text, very probably from the eleventh century, is a letter written by a former Christian, apparently a monk or clergyman, who claims that, after his conversion, he composed a series of fourteen apologies (now lost), which he then gave to various priests:

After I circumcised the flesh of my foreskin and began to observe the festivals of the Lord written in the Torah and keep the Sabbath, the uncircumcised knew and understood that I left their religion and chose the religion of Israel. And I was afraid that they would kill me, so I anticipated [this] and wrote fourteen pamphlets [*qu[n]ṭrasim*] explaining in them my answers and questions. I gave [them] to the chief priest [bishop?]...and I said to him [*sic*], "If only you knew, my lord, that I abandoned the religion of the uncircumcised on account of the questions and answers written in this book.... Read this book. If I have done wrong in abandoning the [Christian] religion, then show me, teach me and respond with responses and good answers and I will turn back immediately." I was confident that, by the grace of God, all possessing knowledge

among them [the uncircumcised], if they read them [the pamphlets], would return to the religion of Israel.³⁸

This fragment is notable both for its first-person confessional tone—above all in its bold offer to convert back if provided with sufficient reasons—and for its direct connection between conversion and disputation. His new faith is summarized and justified in “a book.” As in Halevi’s text, conversion becomes a premise for confrontation, and the author’s narrative of transformation blends seamlessly into the direct challenge to the reader to “teach me and respond” with valid counterarguments. In the same way, the success of his opinions to convince his interlocutor impacts not only the conversion or reversion of the author of this treatise, but also, as the writer himself claims, the future conversion of any possible readers. The actions marking the conversion—circumcision, observance of festivals, keeping the Sabbath—are only preliminary to the composition of the pamphlets. Reflecting a more Christian than Jewish paradigm, the author’s conversion depends for its authenticity not on his pious behavior but on the claims of his book. In this compelling fragment, conversion and text are bound together in a single affirmation of authorial voice.

The presumably real but anonymous author of this fragmentary letter had a contemporary fictional counterpart in the curiously similar figure of “the priest,” who emerges as a character in the anti-Christian Arabic *Account of the Disputation of the Priest (Qiṣṣat Mujādalat al-Uṣṣuf)*, also preserved partly in Genizah fragments. This text of uncertain provenance was translated into Hebrew and expanded, very probably in the twelfth century and possibly by Andalusī Jews, as *The Book of Nestor the Priest (Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer)*, a form in which it was widely disseminated.³⁹ Both versions of the work consist of a series of attacks on Christian belief in the Trinity and the Incarnation, the divine nature of Jesus, internal contradictions within New Testament sources, and arguments about the crucifixion. Both begin, moreover, although in slightly different ways, with a brief anecdotal frame establishing the priest’s conversion to Judaism. The Arabic account begins, “This is the book of the priest...who had converted to Judaism [*tawahhada (sic)*]. He did not enter to the Jewish religion until he had disputed with the Christian scholars who had taught him the Gospel in order to demonstrate to them their error and their heresy.”⁴⁰ This is expanded in the Hebrew version, where the conversion of the priest, there named Nestor, takes on the character of a literary tale through a longer concatenation of events and consequences: “This is the Book of Nestor the Priest who loved the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might. He detested the foolish and vain faith of the uncircumcised and he

came to shelter under the wings of the Heavenly Presence. He chose eternal life since he was a man who was wise in Scriptures. God brightened his eyes, he entered the Jewish religion, and he circumcised the flesh of his foreskin. He did not do so, however, until he had debated with every uncircumcised sage and every one who understood their books. He even sent letters to all the sages of the gentiles.”⁴¹ The Hebrew version embellishes the action by expanding the description of Nestor as one “who had converted” into an active process of transformation: Nestor “loved the Lord” and “detested the foolish.” When “God brightened his eyes,” he “came to shelter,” “chose eternal life,” “entered the religion,” and “circumcised the flesh.” All of these narrated actions that constitute the plot of his conversion story are also part of a single *polemical* gesture of refutation, and together they underscore the fundamentally *textual* foundation of the protagonist’s conversion: “He chose eternal life since he was a man who was wise in Scriptures.” This movement from wisdom in reading Scripture to conversion becomes the basis of his authority to write about both: “he debated” and “sent letters” to the Gentiles, and the actual “Book of Nestor” that we now read is “what he wrote to them.”

Both the Hebrew and Arabic versions also emphasize the protagonist’s expertise in his former religion and his concomitant authority in refuting their beliefs. “Before joining the Jewish religion, he disputed with the Christian scholars who had taught him the Gospel.” In fact, as the Hebrew makes clear, his former teachers were authorities who “understood their books” and “he did not [convert] *until* he had debated” with all of them. In contrast to the Genizah fragments considered above as well as Halevi’s fictional rendition of the Khazar myth, conversion here is both the outcome of debate and also provides the authoritative foundation for further disputation. The Arabic version underscores the authoritative expertise gained from his former training: “He wrote to the priest who had been his close friend and who was well-versed in the Gospels, [as follows]: ‘You and I, we have shared such knowledge of the religion of Christ as no one before us has achieved, nor will anyone after us. Let me then defend the religion of God and of his prophets, and explain to you the Christian creed.’”⁴² The Hebrew version emphasizes the knowledge of his enemy gained through his education and exchange of letters. Nestor “understood and knew all their error and the darkness in which he had [previously] been.”

Like the anonymous convert of the Genizah who wrote “fourteen pamphlets,” Nestor also “wrote a letter and sent it to one priest whom the uncircumcised had chosen to debate with him.” Nestor’s implied path of evolution from “darkness” to “brightness” and from “the

foolish and vain faith of the uncircumcised” to his new Jewish faith was also a process of authorization by which “God has strengthened me...to explain to you the erroneous faith of the uncircumcised.” By virtue of his complete knowledge of Christian “error” and “darkness,” knowledge that “no one before us achieved, nor will anyone after us,” he possessed the “unique” authority to “explain to you the erroneous faith of the uncircumcised” and to offer “testimony about God.” His testimony is authorized by his knowledge of his former religion and the authenticity of his first-person voice. The understanding of conversion as a constituent part of the larger theological message of the text has much in common with contemporary Christian representations, and this may have contributed to the work’s impact on later anti-Christian writers.⁴³

A MAN SEEKING WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE IN BOOKS: THE NARRATIVE OF GIUÀN/OBADIAH OF OPPIDO

Without a doubt the best known story of conversion to Judaism preserved in the Cairo Genizah is that of Obadiah *ha-Ger* (the proselyte), born in the early eleventh century as Giuàn (Giovanni or John) into a part-Norman family in the southern Italian town of Oppido. Giuàn/Obadiah is so well-known in part because, in addition to his conversion, he has achieved the distinction of being the author of the oldest known signed Hebrew musical manuscript. Since the emergence at the beginning of the twentieth century of information about his life and career, scholars have slowly pieced together three types of documents attributed to or referring to him: his musical compositions, a letter of recommendation describing his conversion in 1102, and an account of his conversion to Judaism. In addition to reconstructing the facts of his life and career, scholars—most notably Norman Golb—have pieced together various Genizah fragments of what seem to be his own words (“written with his own hand,” although in the third person) narrating his adoption of Judaism. Of all the known sources relating to conversion to Judaism in the medieval Mediterranean, the account of Giuàn/Obadiah is the most substantial to survive and bears the most complex narrative and symbolic textual structure.

The story begins with the meaningful circumstances of his birth as a twin in the late eleventh century:

[Giuàn/Obadiah’s father] took a wife named Maríá, and Maríá

conceived and bore unto Dreux her husband two sons on the same day—the first [born] according to the usual manner of women as to their children [*ke-ḥuqat ha-nashim li-veneihen*], to whom they gave the name Rogerius, that is, Rogier. [As for] the second, his lower [parts] came (out) first [*va-aḥurit yavo' ri'shonah*], his mother bearing him with great pain. She gave him the name Joha[nnes], that is, Giovan. The youths grew up; Rogerius became a man who sought the sword and warfare, whereas Johannes became a man seeking wisdom and knowledge in books.⁴⁴

These circumstances seem to augur Giuàn/Obadiah's future conversion and departure from the family and community of his birth. He is a twin, one of two sons born "on the same day" to his Christian parents, but who followed a different path in his life. While his brother Rogier was a "man who sought the sword and warfare" (a crusader or defender of the Norman kingdom of Sicily, perhaps), Giuàn/Obadiah sought "wisdom and knowledge in books." This fact is repeated in the letter of recommendation also found among the Genizah sources. Written by a prominent twelfth-century rabbi in Aleppo, Barukh ben Isaac (d. ca. 1125?), it describes how Giuàn/Obadiah was an "expert [*baqi*] in the reading of [Christian] boo[k]s. Because of his understanding of what he read [in the b]ooks of their error, he [re]turned [*shav*] to the Lord of Israel with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his strength, and became a proselyte [*nitgayyer*] in a law court of Israel."⁴⁵ Not only do we see in this description—as we saw in the Schechter letter—a conflation of models of conversion as a pious return (*teshuvah*) and as a social conversion (*giyyur*). In his narrative, Giuàn/Obadiah also evokes another opposition between action and contemplation as an opposition between the natural and the unnatural: Rogier was born "according to the usual manner of women as to their children" (i.e., cephalic presentation), while Giuàn/Obadiah was breech: "his lower [parts] came [out] first." The opposed characterizations, soldier/scholar and normal/inverted, give shape to Giuàn/Obadiah's spiritual inversion through the process of becoming Jewish. His conversion, like his birth, was a return to God at the same time that it was a reversal of his natural state in Norman Italy, something that caused his mother "great pain."

Because of his love of books and learning over war and action, Giuàn/Obadiah is captivated by the legend of another recent convert to Judaism, that of one "Archbishop Andraeas, the high priest [*episkapos hakohen ha-gadol*] in the city of Bari," which Giuàn/Obadiah describes as having taken place "while he was still a youth [*na'ar*] in the house of Dreux [Droculus] his father." This parallel conversion (which seems to have taken place around 1070) prefigures

that of Giuàn/Obadiah, just as those of Anthony and Marius Victorinus prefigured and inspired Augustine's conversion. As in the *Confessions*, in which the protagonist's conversion is told in the context of many other embedded narratives, so the conversion of Bishop Andraeas is told as a story within the story of Giuàn/Obadiah. As he relates, "It happened at that time...that the Lord put the love of the Torah of Moses into [Andraeas's] heart. He forsook his land, [his] priesthood [and a]ll his glory and came to the city of Constantinople, [where] he circumcised the flesh of his foreskin. There [pa]ssed over him sufferings and hardships."⁴⁶ As in other documents in the Genizah, this account of Andraeas presents a parallel physical and spiritual movement. When he "forsook his land" for Constantinople and then went to Egypt, he also forsook his tradition, his rank, and his foreskin. His departure and pilgrimage have as their echo an eventual legendary report of his transformation "that reached unto the entire land of Lombardy and unto the sages of Greece and the sages of Rome." This news made many Christians "ashamed when they h[ear]d the report about him." Just as, according to Augustine, Marius Victorinus proved to be an *auctoritas ad salutem* by inspiring many to follow him, so Andraeas became a model for others to emulate: "Many went up after him and, ob[serving] his deeds [*ve-ro'im et ma'asav*], they did as he had done—they also entered the covenant of the living God."⁴⁷

The two opening scenes of Giuàn/Obadiah's birth and Andraeas's conversion prefigure Giuàn/Obadiah's conversion experience and color it as a fulfillment of earlier prophetic signs. "Now in the first year in which Johannes was initially defiled by nocturnal emissions [*teḥilat ṭum'ato miqrei laylah*] in the house of Dreux his father, in that year [he] had a dream—lo he was officiating at the main church of Oppido.... [He] looked [up] and beheld a man standing to his right opposite the altar. He [said] to him, 'Johannes!'"⁴⁸ The "shame" felt by other Christians upon the conversion of Andraeas is here evoked again as the "defilement" of Giuàn/Obadiah in his father's house, a wet dream signifying his transition to adolescence and the beginning of his abandoning the traditions of his family.⁴⁹ The "defilement" he experiences "in the house of Dreux his father" is the counterpoint to his conversionary dream in the same year "at the main church," the symbolic house of his father's God. There he is called by his new father figure away from his path to the priesthood toward his new life.

Although the text immediately following his prophetic call is too fragmentary to be fully decipherable, he seems to have had another vision of another man who caused him to "fear" and "tremble," becoming indelibly inscribed in his memory. "Obadiah the Proselyte put it in his heart to remember [these things] but he knew not their

meaning until [he had studied the words of] Moses the servant of God in the script of the Lord [in the language of the Hebrews] from the beginning of the Torah until its end.”⁵⁰ His reference to “script of the Lord [*mikhtav ha-elohim*]” further symbolizes his change of identity. Between his two dreams, Giuàn/Obadiah mentions a lunar eclipse (probably the one on February 11, 1096, when the moon allegedly seemed to turn red) and cites an apocalyptic verse from Joel 2:31, “The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.” Rather than citing it directly in Hebrew, however, he writes in Latin but with Hebrew characters.⁵¹ In one sense, this attention to Latin, in contrast to the importance stressed elsewhere of reading the Bible in Hebrew, may be a means of establishing the author’s authority as an expert in his former religion. In another sense, because the text must certainly have been written for a Jewish rather than a Christian readership, the words of the Latin quotation given in Hebrew letters (“*[sol] convertetur in tenebra[s]*”) provide another level of signification of his conversion, symbolizing both his spiritual transformation and his divided position partly between Latin and Hebrew textual communities. As the sun “is converted” into shadow and Latin back into Hebrew, so Giuàn, the breech-born opposite of his Christian twin brother, “is converted” into Obadiah and leaves his home in Italy to make a new life in Baghdad, Aleppo, and Cairo. As in Judah/Herman’s dream, the prophetic reverie in Giuàn/Obadiah’s text begins a story of transformation that is fulfilled only in the correct interpretation and correct action available to him upon conversion.

As in Christian accounts, linguistic mastery plays a key role in the establishment of authority, and translation comes to symbolize the process of conversion itself. Here, however, the Christian attempt to convert the Hebrew Bible into the Old Testament of the Vulgate Bible is reversed by the return of the Latin Scripture in a Hebrew guise. Both literally and symbolically, Giuàn/Obadiah reads and understands his “dreams and their interpretations in the prophecy of Moses,” and he thus constructs his conversion as a report of his physical journey from Oppido to Baghdad and his spiritual pilgrimage from wrong to right understanding.

STORY AND HISTORY

In comparison with the examples presented earlier in this chapter, the rich narrative details and structure of Giuàn/Obadiah’s conversion story are a fortuitous anomaly. Despite the various hints about conversion that can be compiled by combing through massive

collections like the Cairo Genizah, such references are relatively few, possibly because of the substantial danger for Jews of drawing attention to conversion from the majority religions of Islam and Christianity.⁵² Even more important for our purposes, stories containing more elaborate narrative representations, especially in connection with a larger polemical or apologetic theme, are even less common.

Those writings relating to conversion discussed briefly above—the *Disputation of the Priest/Polemic of Nestor*, the *Kuzari*, the fragments of Giuàn/Obadiah—emerge around the twelfth century even though they are based on earlier sources in some way. While the Arabic *Account* was written earlier, probably in the ninth century, its Hebrew rewriting is first mentioned by the author Jacob ben Reuben and seems to date from the twelfth century. Similarly, while both the Judeo-Arabic original of the *Kuzari* and the Hebrew translation of Judah Ibn Tibbon date from the mid-twelfth century, they are in part reworking legends that survive in much earlier sources. Giuàn/Obadiah, even though his own story builds upon that of the eleventh-century conversion of Bishop Andraeas and resembles earlier, eleventh-century Genizah fragments in its tale of physical migrations from west to east, dates his conversion in 1102 and describes his subsequent travels in detail. The Hebrew *Book of Nestor*, among the earliest anti-Christian polemics in Hebrew, does seem to mark the beginning of a surge in anti-Christian writing in the later twelfth century, as evident in such writers as Jacob ben Reuben and Joseph Kimhi (d. 1170) and the material collected into the *Niẓẓaḥon Vetus*.

In most of the examples considered in this chapter, however, the description of conversion is not elaborated in narrative terms; there is no development of inner or outer conflict, little description of the identity of the convert before conversion, little focus on the dramatic moment of conversion itself. In addition, the former belief of the convert (Christianity in the case of the *Qiṣṣat/Nestor* texts and the author of the fourteen pamphlets, native religion in the case of the Khazar documents, including the *Kuzari*) is not given the same attention as the former religion is given in Christian conversionary fictions. In the case of Halevi's *Kuzari*, whose function is an apologetic defense of Judaism, all non-Jewish beliefs are shown to be equally incorrect and no other "false" religion provides a necessary precursor to Jewish truth. More important, as we have seen, given Halevi's essentialist views of the inferiority of converts relative to natural-born Jews, conversion is less a reflection on the past than a projection into the future. The conversion of the Khazar king provides a doorway to the apologetic defense of Judaism. In Halevi's eyes, however, the convert does not embody the core truth of Jewish sacred history

because, as a Gentile, he is not an essential part of that history. While the convert is used as a polemical tool, the historical mythology being dramatized here is not simply one of conversion from Gentile to Jew but of Israel's conversion from faithlessness to covenant.

The case of Giuàn/Obadiah is more complicated from a narrative perspective, and in this it seems to differ from the representation of conversion in other examples. In particular, his story seems to be directly informed by a Christian model of narrating conversion. This becomes clear if we compare Giuàn/Obadiah's dramatic frame with that of the *Kuzari*. In Halevi's text, the dream that leads the king of the Khazars to seek the truth and eventually convert himself and his people to Judaism is patterned as a prophetic call, but his calling is a personal, moral calling because he himself is excluded from the gift of prophecy and from Jewish sacred history more generally. The king's dream, like the visitation of an angel, simply informs him, "Your way of thinking is indeed pleasing to the Creator, but not your way of acting." It does not promise his conversion but simply sets off a chain of events that "caused him to ponder over the different beliefs and religions, and finally to become a convert to Judaism together with many other Khazars." What Halevi labels as "the secret of [the king's] dream and its repetition" is merely that he was on the wrong path and needed to align his conduct with his right belief. Conversion is less a question of faith and interpretation than of action and worship.

The dream of Giuàn/Obadiah, by contrast, does present a prophetic calling that makes his conversion a fulfillment of Jewish Scripture. This is reflected first in his citation of biblical verses in his dream, and then also in the presentation of his dream as part of a web of expectation and fulfillment that is similarly reflected in the details of his birth as a twin who was not born in the normal way and who caused his mother pain. In contrast to the description of the king of the Khazars, the details with which Giuàn/Obadiah's narrative begins can be read as symbols that presage the later climax and fulfillment of his conversion. The prophetic call of his dream is a call not simply away from the error of his old life but toward the inexorable unfolding of his destiny. The emplotment of his life jumps forward and backward in time, while that of the king of the Khazars is more or less a chronologically ordered unfolding on a direct path from error to truth and in the social context of a clear hierarchy of "racial" Jews and those who only approximate them. The details of Giuàn/Obadiah's life are tropes that require the exegesis of his life through his narrative, while those of the Khazar king are merely circumstantial facts that speak for themselves and are, for their authors, literally historically true. As Halevi claims, he wrote down the history "as it occurred."

Giuàn/Obadiah's account, although it is based on Christian models, carries an implicit anti-Christian attack. Although Golb has argued that the author "refrained from indulging in polemics," this can be affirmed only in a limited sense.⁵³ It is true that there is a lack of explicit theological argumentation, but the very fact that the text stresses circumcision and proper reading above all may point to an implicit rejection of Christian notions of conversion. Moreover, in addition to following a Christian model of narrating conversion, Giuàn/Obadiah's writing is clearly marked by an awareness of Christian anti-Jewish thought. For example, his reference to the solar eclipse of 1096 is also a reference to Pope Urban II, who had initiated the first crusade a year earlier, unleashing soldiers who fought "[against the Ish]maelites and the Jews." He likewise cites what was being said in "the camps of the Franks" at this time: "Why is it that we [fight] against our enemies, when, behold, in our [own] lands [reside] our enemies and those who hate [us? Why should we lea]ve them with our women?"⁵⁴ This crusading discourse bears an uncanny similarity to the anti-Jewish opinions presented by Peter the Venerable in a letter written a few decades after Giuàn/Obadiah's narrative: "Why should we pursue the enemies of the Christian hope in far and distant lands while the Jews—vile blasphemers far worse than any Saracens [*longeque Sarracenis deteriores Judaei*]*—who are not far away from us, but who live in our midst, blaspheme, abuse, and trample on Christ and the Christian sacraments so freely and insolently and with impunity?"*⁵⁵ Such similarities cannot be taken as evidence of any direct borrowing from Giuàn/Obadiah by Peter the Venerable. What they do suggest, however, is a clear Christian background to Giuàn/Obadiah's narrative resulting from the author's early education and obvious knowledge of Christian traditions.

The tacit influence of Christian models does not come as a surprise, given the author's background. In analyzing his musical compositions, various scholars have defended the case that the melodies he records seem to be based on Gregorian tropes from Christian liturgical music and that his citation of Joel 2:31 has clear liturgical parallels.⁵⁶ This musical *contrafactum* suggests a pattern of transfer from Latin to Hebrew that also defines Giuàn/Obadiah's memoirs. Taken together in this light, the various other elements drawn from his Christian past (use of Augustinian tropes and narrative figures, citation of the Bible in Latin as well as Hebrew, mention of the "Apostolic Pope" and of the incendiary Christian rhetoric in "the camps of the Franks"), all evince the fact that Giuàn/Obadiah's conversion story, despite its Hebrew form and intended Jewish audience, was constructed at least in part on the basis of and in response to Christian models. Such a background necessarily implies

an awareness that any narration of conversion from Christianity carries an implicitly confrontational message.

Most of the examples considered earlier differ from Giuàn/Obadiah's text in their general inattention to stories of conversion. Conversion accounts did sometimes accompany or introduce polemical discourse, as the cases of *Nestor* and the Genizah author of "fourteen pamphlets" show. But these texts do not draw a close connection between the narrative unfolding of conversion—the characterization of the self before conversion, the dramatization of the struggle and journey, the tropes of divine revelation or prophetic dreams—and the trajectory of sacred history. This use of conversion stories—or, as suggested by the examples of Bodo/Eleazar and Wecelinus considered earlier, apostasy stories—plays a more frequent role in Christian works because of the affinity between retrospective narration and supersessionist history.

This conclusion echoes one of the central arguments defended in this book: that in the medieval Mediterranean and its environs, conversion, when given the form of a story, is a predominantly Christian formulation serving to convey a model of history that is, at its core, apologetic in function and polemical in tone. As I argued in the previous chapter, the function of conversion narratives in twelfth-century Christian writers such as Moses/Petrus Alfonsi and Judah/Herman of Cologne was principally to stabilize and express in new terms a traditional Augustinian model of Christian history that was both exegetical and teleological. In contrast to those twelfth-century examples, the accounts of conversion to Judaism examined above point to a very different sacred history from that of Christian sources by placing more attention on the defense of faith after conversion than on the portentous infidelity that precedes it. This is, I would argue, because the narrational form of conversion as a dialectic of error and truth plotted across a movement from past to present does not inherently support either a prophetic concept of returning to the original law of Moses or a rabbinical notion of fulfilling the mythic paradigm of belief that follows the biblical patriarchs in the same way it does support a Christian notion of the supplanting of the old law by the new. To put it differently, medieval Christian arguments had to rely far more on narration than Jewish arguments did because the former expressed a figural vision of salvation while the latter did not.

To understand what is at stake in this comparison, we must consider some of the common rabbinical and medieval Jewish characterizations of time as they can be brought to bear on anti-Christian and anti-Muslim arguments. Many scholars of comparative religion (most prominently Mircea Eliade) have dubiously described "Jewish time" in monolithic terms as little more than "biblical time"

and thus wrongly characterized Jewish ideas of temporality as both uniform and strictly linear. This notion is problematic in various respects, two of which concern me here. First, it is based on a Christian worldview in which Judaism can be equated with biblical Israel. Second, it also relies on a Western, rationalistic conception of time in which time is conceived independently of space and in which linear and cyclical time are mutually exclusive. In critiquing these assumptions (widespread in studies that attempt to compare notions of time and salvation in Judaism and Christianity), Moshe Idel has rightly argued that “the classification of Judaism as a religion based solely on a salvation historical time is an oversimplification that... ignores any later developments that occurred in both Talmudic and Kabbalistic versions of Judaism.”⁵⁷ He has also affirmed that the “linear time” associated with biblical *Heilsgeschichte* does not necessarily exclude a cyclical conception of time manifest in ritual and the daily fulfillment of God’s commandments to Moses. In fact, he and others such as Yosef Yerushalmi have affirmed that rabbinical ideas of history are largely *ahistorical* and cannot be explained properly either as linear or cyclical. The transition from biblical to rabbinical Judaism involved, in Nissan Rubin’s words, a “transition from a collective historical memory to a collective ahistorical memory.”⁵⁸

In describing this view, these scholars have argued that in some medieval Jewish texts, temporal history was represented not as a sequence of historical events but as a figural repetition of biblical paradigms, an idea epitomized in the rendition by Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides) of Girona (d. 1270) of the familiar dictum that “what happened to the fathers is a sign to the sons [*mah she-ira’ la-avot siman labanim*].”⁵⁹ Unlike Christian figuralism, this view sees the present not as a *fulfillment* of the past but as a *repetition* and commemoration of it. In comparing Christian and Jewish uses of typology, Amos Funkenstein has argued that the rabbinical paradigm of the formative biblical past is not premised on a notion of progress in either history or prophecy but is based instead on a devotional concept of repetition and renewal. He explains, “Typologies, and for that matter all forms of historical speculations in Christianity, express a distinct sense of steady progress within history.... Jews lacked such a sense of progress and hence the desire to show how matters repeat themselves periodically on a higher level.... Christianity proves itself through history and through its success in history. In its own understanding, its meaning is still unfolding. This was not at all the self-perception of traditional Judaism. Not until Krochmal [d. 1840] could any Jewish thinker conceive of Jewish history as the unfolding of a still concealed content.”⁶⁰ While Marc Saperstein has argued that this view does not accurately describe the use of typology in Jewish

sermons after the thirteenth century, I believe Funkenstein's view does accurately describe the perspective found in medieval disputational contexts both before and after Nahmanides wrote.⁶¹

The upshot of Funkenstein's argument for my purposes is that the Christian representation of salvation history so naturally embodied by narrative foreshadowing, climax, and recall is dramatically different from a nonsupersessionist mythology of historical and cosmic redemption and reunification in Judaism. As a result, conversion and proselytism, although important issues in medieval Jewish thought, play a less prominent role in the Jewish depictions of history considered here than in the Christian ones. The Augustinian narrational model, designed as it was to accommodate the paradox of a simultaneous apologetic return to truth along with an aggressive rupture from the past, was very different from the Jewish model expressing the traditional prophetic call to return to the enduring truth of the original law through memory and ritual fulfillment of the commandments. In contrast to the image of conversion found repeatedly in Christian narratives, in which Judaism in particular played a key role, stories of conversion to Judaism seem more about renewing individual faith than reflecting the history of the faithful. Even in the most essentialist apologetic works (such as those of Judah Halevi and the *Zohar*), the particulars of Christian or Muslim belief or ideas of history, if they entered the discussion at all, were of only circumstantial consequence to Jewish thought. They formed no part of an essential definition of Jewish history in the way that Jewish history was an essential component of Christian and Muslim definitions. When Jewish sources speak of conversion as a means of reflecting on faith, it is more in predictions of the final redemption of the Jews but very little in narrated accounts of past conversions.⁶² Because of these important differences, the eleventh- and twelfth-century sources describing conversion to Judaism provide an illuminating contradistinction to the twelfth-century Christian examples considered in the previous chapter. The myth of the Khazars in particular, expressed in various forms, reflected Jewish notions of history that were essentially stable and unchanged, while the Christian return to fictive narration of conversion as pioneered by Augustine reflected a rapidly changing paradigm of textual authority in Christian argument.



I have thus far explored how the structure and language of Christian narratives played an important role in the twelfth century as one of the two principal responses to the gradual unsettling of traditional

notions of *auctoritas* in Christian thought. Having highlighted this function even more by contrasting it with the thoroughly different nature of contemporary Jewish sources up to and during the twelfth century, I wish to return to a discussion of Christian paradigms in the next chapter. Moving past the twelfth century, I look at the other principal Christian response to that disorientation in *auctoritas*: the increased attention to foreign language as a marker of authenticity and as a stand-in for the narrated testimony of converts. As we will see in looking at the thirteenth-century works that follow in the wake of the examples examined above, polemicists found that words could be converted as easily as selves, and thus translation came to reflect Christian notions of salvation history as much as the narration of conversion did.

A War of Words

Translating Authority in Thirteenth-Century Polemic

Der Jargon der Eigentlichkeit ist Ideologie als Sprache. [The jargon of authenticity is ideology as language.]

—THEODOR ADORNO, *Der Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* (*The Jargon of Authenticity*)

On Friday, July 20, 1263, a converted Jew named Fra Pau Cristià (Friar Paul Christian), and also possibly called Saule (Saul) before his conversion, stood in the Royal Palace of Barcelona before two great men, King Jaume of Aragon and the great rabbi of Girona, Nahmanides.¹ This convert had been born in a Jewish community probably in northern Spain or southern France and, one assumes, had received a Jewish education. Apparently using what he had learned before converting, Fra Pau proposed to prove that the Talmud and other rabbinical sources actually argued that the awaited Messiah of Jewish tradition had already come. According to his Hebrew account of the events, Nahmanides then said, “If these Sages [of the Talmud] believed in the messiahship of Jesus...how could they have remained in the Jewish religion?...Why did they not apostatize and turn to Jesus’ religion as did Friar Paul...who [apparently] understands the words better than they themselves did?”² Nahmanides’ statement, the first of many intricate arguments in the debate, reveals much about how he viewed Fra Pau’s conversion. Not only was the friar one who, in the talmudic dictum describing Jesus, “burns his food in public [*she-hiqdiaḥ tavshilo ba-rabim*],” a euphemism for a disciple who uses his Jewish education against Judaism. He was also one who spoke as if he “underst[ood] the [rabbis’] words better than they themselves did.” For Nahmanides, according to his assertions in his Hebrew account, apostasy to Christianity like that of Fra Pau came cheek-by-jowl with the dubious claim to expertise in reading. As we will see, his main strategy of defense against this claim was to impugn his

adversary's linguistic and textual knowledge. But his opening remark sums up an attitude that would define Western ideas about conversion throughout the thirteenth century: conversion and apostasy were enacted through the use and abuse of authorities and by displaying the knowledge of original works in their original languages. In the thirteenth century, conversion came to be tied inextricably to translation.

In [Chapter 2](#) I claimed that the increasing appeal to philosophical ideas within Christian apologetics around the dawn of the twelfth century led to an expansion of the foundations of proof to include narrativized experience alongside reason and authority. By expressing and framing claims through an emplotted testimony of transformation, Christian conversion accounts such as that of Moses/Petrus framed the authoritative use of non-Christian sources such as Talmud and Qur'ān without conceding any belief in their truth as textual witnesses. The testimony of the convert, portrayed as an expert in his preconversion faith, could serve as an explicit deprecation of his former corpus of authorities, but also as a constant evocation of that corpus through the rehearsal of its abrogation and defeat. The sequence of narrative, encompassing past and present in a kind of paradigm of evolution, provided a diachronic space in which the Jewish past, like the reconverted self, could be evoked at the same time it was rejected.

This slippage in the authoritative foundations (*auctoritas*) of argument in which conversion was associated with knowledge of non-Christian books led to two key developments in the thirteenth century: an increasing attention to the original language and content of such books as markers of their authenticity and a decisive shift from the rejection of those sources to an appeal to them. These two areas converge in the disputes of Dominicans in the second half of the thirteenth century, including those attributed to the convert Fra Pau at the Disputation of Barcelona in 1263 and again at a sermon given in Paris a decade later, and even more in the oeuvre of Ramon Martí. In the ideas of both Dominicans, there is a notable shift toward the treatment of non-Christian sources as *auctoritates*, as valid proof texts, which, albeit flawed, are *not* devoid of authority, even of Christian authority. As these came to play the role of *auctoritates*, brought *malgré soi* into the service of Christian ideas, there arose an intensified concern with the authenticity and original form of those sources as the primary means of evaluating their intrinsic worth. In this critically important shift, writers around the turn of the fourteenth century were forced to reexamine and express in new terms the very nature of textual *auctoritas* in anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim argument.

In this chapter and the next, I examine these two developments in late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century religious writing.

Although the history of thirteenth-century controversy and language study, like that of the twelfth century, has been considered in detail in numerous studies, these studies have tended to frame this history as one of Dominican contact with real non-Christians rather than reflections of Dominican engagement with the problem of *auctoritas* within its theology. Moreover, very little attempt has been made to follow these thirteenth-century trends into the works of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid, where the question of *auctoritas* directly intersects with the first-person voice of narrated authorial testimony.³ Abner/Alfonso's output does not simply reflect the tradition that came before but in effect constitutes the most developed and elaborate representation of all the aspects of that tradition, and no consideration of conversion and polemic in the later Middle Ages can ignore his rich, extensive corpus of writing. In order to draw out the issues at stake in studying Abner/Alfonso, however, we must first establish in more detail the implications of the thirteenth-century shift in *auctoritas* on language and translation, because it was there that the questions that converge in Abner/Alfonso's thought were first raised.

MOLDING AUTHORITY'S WAXEN NOSE: RAMON MARTÍ AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

The history of the Christian condemnation and burning of the Talmud in the thirteenth century is a familiar one. In 1236,⁴ the converted Jew Nicolas Donin denounced the Talmud to the papacy for containing remarks against Christians and Christianity, for encouraging anti-Christian behavior, for containing blasphemies, obscenities, and other absurd remarks, for presenting itself as something given by God rather than man, and for constituting a deviation from biblical teaching.⁵ Although this last accusation was, in fact, not taken up by the Church in its subsequent condemnation of the Talmud, this point has served for debate among scholars over the significance of this new postbiblical literature in Christian anti-Jewish policies.⁶ Nearly three years after Donin's accusations, Pope Gregory IX wrote a letter (delivered by Donin) to the bishop of Paris, Guillaume d'Auvergne, including Donin's accusations and commanding him to write to all the archbishops and kings of France, England, Portugal, and Spain, ordering them to confiscate Jewish books on the first Sabbath of Lent in the following year (March 3, 1240) when Jews would be in synagogue.⁷ The Dominican and Franciscan friars were to investigate the books and burn any that contained doctrinal errors. King Louis IX of France, the only monarch who actually carried out these papal mandates, then called for

proceedings in which the Jews could defend themselves. Presided over by Louis's mother, Blanche of Castile (the great-aunt of the Castilian king Alfonso X, the Wise), the "dispute" that resulted between Nicolas Donin and Rabbi Yehiel ben Joseph of Paris, as well as the more formal "trial" of the Talmud that followed (assuming these were separate events), took place around June 1240.⁸ The confrontation resulted in the burning of thousands of Hebrew manuscripts in 1242, mainly at the instigation of King Louis. The events were repeated in 1244, when Pope Innocent IV repeated the call to burn any remaining copies of the Talmud that could be found.⁹ The Christian approach to the Talmud over the course of these events, although more detailed in its focus on the actual content of the Talmud, was not essentially different from the attitude evident a century earlier in the polemics of Moses/Petrus Alfonsi and Peter the Venerable, in which the Talmud and other rabbinical texts were condemned as blasphemous and almost no appeal was made to them as a foundation of revelation or authority. In fact, Donin's very first point of attack on the Talmud, before listing all of the "blasphemies," "errors," "stupidities," "turbidities," and incredible "stories" therein, concerns its lack of "authority."

A notable shift takes place in the treatment of original, non-Christian sources between this attack on the Talmud by Donin in the 1240s and that made on the Qur'ān by the Dominican Ramon Martí less than two decades later. Although both recognize that non-Christian books are authoritative for some, Martí aims to capitalize on the same examples that Donin condemns as blasphemous. Over the course of Martí's career, which spanned the years from his entrance in the Dominican order (approximately in the late 1230s) until his death sometime after 1284, he composed a spate of treatises that included refutations of both Judaism and Islam on the basis of non-Christian citations. His first works, *Explanation of the Apostles' Creed* (*Explanatio symboli apostolorum*), composed around 1256–57, and *On the Sect of Muhammad* (*De Seta Machometi*), of unknown date but probably from the same period, draw, in various passages, from the Qur'ān, *hadith*, and Arabic philosophers such as Avicenna, al-Ghazālī, and Averroes.¹⁰ While the *Explanation* principally contains an apologetic, theological discussion of the foundations of Christian belief into which Martí blended an attack on Islam, *On the Sect* focuses exclusively on anti-Islamic pronouncements and includes an *ad hominem* attack on Muhammad and his status as a prophet.¹¹

The shift between Donin's attack on the authority of the Talmud and Martí's *appeal* to the Qur'ān as a proof text is evident from the very beginning of the *Explanation*, where Martí states, "That the true law and Gospels are uncorrupted can be proven by the Qur'ān [*Quod*

vero lex et Evangelium sint incorrupta, potest ostendi per Alcoranum].” He subsequently invokes verses from the Qur’ān in support of his claims, and even goes so far as to say that Muhammad “testified” (*testatus est*) to the survival of the law among the Jews.¹² In his *On the Sect*, although he harshly attacks Muhammad and Islam as mendacious, he still cites the Qur’ān as an “auctoritas.”¹³ This change in attitude does not mitigate Martí’s rejection of Islam or his attack on Muhammad as a false prophet, but it does point to the novel way that non-Christian sources were regarded. In Martí’s largest, final work, the *Dagger of Faith* (*Pugio fidei*) from 1278, he again cites the Qur’ān, this time in support of his pro-Christian notions about Jesus against the Jews, adding to these new citations from Muslim *ḥadīth* (traditions about Muhammad), which he characterizes as “books that are authentic among the Saracens [in *libris authenticis apud Sarracenos*].”¹⁴ He in fact alludes to the Muslim belief that the text is divinely revealed without immediately attacking it, referring to the “things that Muhammad said in the Qur’ān that God said to him through Gabriel about the Virgin Mary, mother of God.”¹⁵ Similarly, Martí’s contemporary, the Dominican Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, who vehemently attacked Islam, still used this new argument, claiming that the Qur’ān itself supports the authority of the Gospels: “We have the authority of the Gospel, even as the Qur’ān testifies.”¹⁶ This approach, which seeks to exploit notions of alien authority to undermine non-Christian beliefs rather than directly attack those beliefs and the Scriptures that express them, contrasts sharply with twelfth-century condemnations of the Qur’ān such as those of Peter the Venerable, who calls the Qur’ān a “heinous writing [*nefariam scripturam*],” or the anonymous annotator of the Latin translation of the Qur’ān commissioned by Peter who dismisses it as “diabolical heresy,” or condemnations of Muhammad such as those of Moses/Petrus Alfonsi, who calls him “that liar [*illum mendacem*]” who is “deceitful in everything [in *omnibus fallacem inveneris*].”¹⁷ In contrast, Martí’s approach, while no less vitriolic than his twelfth-century forbears, appeals to the “authenticity” of his sources as a foundation for their authoritative support of Christianity, even as it rejects the tradition in which that alleged authenticity is founded.

Examining the enlargement of Christian views about authoritative texts from non-Christian books begs the question of the actual arguments that these sources were intended to buttress. While some historians have characterized Dominican activity in the second half of the thirteenth century as part of a deliberate and orchestrated “missionizing movement” that labored to gain converts from both Jewish and Muslim communities, others have insisted that “Dominicans...simply did not see conversion of Muslims and Jews as a

significant part of their undertaking at the local level.”¹⁸ Without entering into the crossfire of this debate in detail, I can state my position by affirming that the changing concept of *auctoritas* in polemical texts of the later thirteenth century does show that there is a continuity of focus between more traditional medieval apologetic writing based on biblical sources and thirteenth-century Dominican writing incorporating postbiblical texts. Despite their occasional presentation in public forums and debates, such “real” application of these ideas was largely staged through obligatory participation or forced sermonizing. This continuity, coupled with the general scarcity of hard data pointing to sustained missionary work among Jews and Muslims, suggests that the arguments in which the authority of non-Christian sources became an issue of discussion were formulated from a thoroughly Christian perspective and were dictated more by the interests of Christian apologetics than by the rhetorical demands of persuasion or missionizing. Although Dominicans showed an abstract interest in the conversion of Jews and Muslims as a desirable effect of their work, they took few steps to adjust the polemical rhetoric of their arguments to that new task and actually dedicated few resources to missionizing before the fourteenth century.¹⁹ Instead, the public display of argumentation, for the most part, merely transposed the rhetoric of traditional, internally directed Christian apologetics onto a public stage that, while occasionally involving real Jewish and Muslim protagonists, seems to have been little more than a reified projection of standard hermeneutic conceptions of difference. In the ideas of thirteenth-century Dominicans as they have come down to us, theological coherence seems always to have trumped rhetorical persuasiveness, and in this sense Dominican writing based on non-Christian sources simply continues the trend of earlier, inward-directed theological discourse of interest and use only to fellow Christian intellectuals. Just as it is a mistake to read conversion narratives affixed to disputational treatises as faithful accounts of real events, likewise it is a mistake to conflate the tropes and language of these treatises, expressed according to the exigencies of traditional polemical and apologetic formulas, with the real history of Dominican engagement with non-Christian groups.

With these caveats in mind, we can appreciate why the shift in the examination of what sources could be considered authoritative from a Christian perspective—a shift first discernible after Donin’s remarks in the early 1240s and explicitly within Martí’s work in the late 1250s—became abundantly evident in the Christian Latin account of the Disputation of Barcelona between Fra Pau and Nahmanides, which took place in the summer of 1263. The debate is known through an anonymous Latin account as well as a Hebrew account written by

Nahmanides himself, both written after the event. The subject of the debate, as prescribed by the Christian side, centered on the question of how rabbinical sources prove that Jesus was the true Messiah. Although the ideas and circumstances of the debate have been treated by many scholars, the particular question of the representation of authority and authoritative sources has not been addressed in enough detail. The anonymous Latin protocol of the dispute evinces a constant concern with the proper methods of claiming authority through textual support. Fra Pau argues “through writings accepted and authoritative among the Jews,” later specified as “the authorities of the Law and the Prophets and by the Talmud.”²⁰ When the friar made his claims “by many authorities from the Talmud [*per multas auctoritates de Thalmut*],” Nahmanides found himself, according to the Christian protocol, “compelled at length by the authorities [*coactus per auctoritates*]” to concede the Christian arguments and so was “defeated by irrefutable proofs and authorities.”²¹ The short account of the debate is saturated with the language of authority, which is repeatedly applied to the Talmud alongside other, more traditional biblical *testimonia*.

Although this constant mention of authority distinguishes the Latin protocol from the Hebrew account, the latter also shows a sensitivity to the importance of such language as the crux of the Christian case. One senses this importance even in Nahmanides’ Hebrew account, in which Fra Pau argues—or is represented as arguing—that the words of Genesis 49:10 (“The scepter shall not depart from Judah...until *shiloh* comes to him”) prophesy the destruction of the temple after the coming of Jesus as the Messiah. He states, “The prophet [Jacob] is thus saying that Judah will always retain power until the Messiah will come from him. If so, since you have neither one tribe nor a ruler’s staff today [*lo’ shevet eḥad ve-lo’ meḥoqueq*], the Messiah who is of his descendants and who has the rulership must have already come.” Nahmanides responds by avoiding the use of the word *power* (or *authority*) and using *kingship* (*melukhah*) and *kingdom* (*malkhut*) in their place, claiming, “The intent thereof is that as long as kingship continues in Israel, it belongs to Judah.”²² Nahmanides attacks Fra Pau for his reliance on aggadic (narrative) rather than halakhic (legal) sources by presenting the former as nonbinding for believing Jews.²³ He relates that on Friday, the first day of the debate, when Fra Pau quoted a well-known Midrash from *Lamentations Rabbah*, he responded plainly, “I do not believe in this Aggadah,” prompting Fra Pau to exclaim, “See, he is renouncing their [sacred] books.”²⁴ Nahmanides then explains that aggadic sources are not prescriptive authorities, but rather “if one believes in it, it is well and good; if one does not believe in it, he will not be harmed [*lo’*

yaziq].”²⁵ His characterization of his response in the Hebrew account contrasts sharply with that presented in the Latin version, which claims that “since [Nahmanides] was unwilling to admit the truth unless compelled by the authorities, when he could not explain the authorities, he said publicly that he did not believe in the authorities which were cited against him, though they were in ancient, authoritative books of the Jews.”²⁶ The repeated Christian references to the “authorities” of the Jews evinces an underlying assumption that, if the Old Testament was not binding for the Jews in the way it was once assumed to be, other authoritative sources were binding, and if the Jews failed to accept things proven on the basis of these, they were guilty of rejecting their own authorities. If the Jews could not be proved to be heretics in reference to biblical laws, they could be found to be so in relation to their own traditions. One way or another, as the Latin protocol affirms, “Authority cannot lie [*Autoritas mentiri non possit*].”²⁷

A different Hebrew account of the later career of Fra Pau, depicting a public philippic delivered to the Jews of Paris in the early 1270s, shows a similar focus on the question of authority. Although this Hebrew account offers much more certain information about a Jewish perception of the events than about the actual words or performance of Fra Pau, the account shows that the Jewish response to Fra Pau was much along the same lines as in Nahmanides’ account, aiming to dismantle Christian attempts to reconfigure the meaning of authoritative sources in apologetic argument. Fra Pau is depicted by the anonymous Parisian Jewish chronicler as a flagitious “unbeliever” (min) who “knows nothing at all, including about reading Scripture [af min ha-miqra’ einkha yode’a kelal].”²⁸ Echoing Nahmanides’ accusation that Fra Pau gives undue attention to nonauthoritative aggadic texts, the account claims, “[He] knows nothing of our law; he has selected only aggadic passages.”²⁹ It also pointedly states, “He comes to convince us by the authority [koah] of an aggadic passage in which there is no Law and no reverence.”³⁰ In the Hebrew accounts of both the Barcelona and Paris encounters, Fra Pau is depicted as appealing to Jewish books as a basis for Christian ideas, and the authors of both accounts depict the Jewish defensive strategy as an attack on the authoritative status of those sources. While all of these sources, both Hebrew and Latin, refer to concrete, historical events, they signify the transformation, or *textualization*, of such events into a theological key attuned more closely to the narrative hermeneutics of religious apologetic than the impartial chronicling of historical events.

Martí’s career spanned the public activity of Fra Pau in Barcelona and Paris, and his writing shows an increasing awareness of the issues at stake, repeating and elaborating many of the same points first

raised by Fra Pau, in his later *Muzzle of the Jews* (*Capistrum Iudaeorum*) and his *Dagger of Faith*. In both of these, he approaches postbiblical Jewish sources, including the Talmud and Midrash, as “books authentic among them [*libris authenticis apud eos*],” just as he composes the *Dagger* on the basis of citations drawn from the Bible and “from Talmud and the remaining writings that are authentic among them.”³¹ This emphasis on authenticity is part of his allusion to these postbiblical texts as a new kind of *auctoritates*, although he is careful to distinguish between those that should be accepted as authoritative by Christians—which would include only Scripture—and those sources like the Talmud and other postbiblical works that are “of some authority [*alicuius auctoritatis*] among the Jews.”³² In the *Muzzle*, he makes this distinction by carefully noting that when the Talmud puts forth a biblical authority with a correct interpretation, it should be accepted. “But if, as it frequently does, it interprets [the text] poorly or outrageously, the explanation is to be thrown out, but the authority retained.”³³ Like the “fair captive” taken in war and then “shaved” and “clipped” to become converted into an Israelite wife (Deuteronomy 21:11–13)—an image that, along with the “gold taken from Egypt,” served throughout the Middle Ages as a metaphor for Christian exegesis of Hebrew scripture—the authority of non-Christian sources could be arrogated for Christian argument as long as the foreign parts were cast aside, “just as we spit out the bones and eat the flesh when we chew fish.”³⁴

Although Martí seems to have felt some anxiety over the estimation of Jewish texts as “authoritative,” he scoured such books exhaustively in search of any references to the Messiah and repeatedly appealed to the “authenticity” of his examples as his principal rhetorical justification. Central to Martí’s conception of authenticity—an issue that will be of critical importance to Abner/Alfonso a few decades after him—is the weight given to the original language and alphabet of his sources. As Martí focused more exclusively on anti-Jewish rather than anti-Muslim claims, language and translation played ever more important roles in his writing, and linguistic authenticity became his concern of repair. Comparing his *Muzzle* with his earlier *Explanation* and *On the Sect* reveals an important trend: whereas all of his citations from non-Christian sources in his early work are given only in Latin, his talmudic citations in the *Muzzle* often include transliterated words interspersed with his Latin translation. For example, we can compare his citation of Qur’ān 4:171 in the earlier *On the Sect* and the later *Muzzle*. In the former, Martí reduces the original almost to a paraphrase: “Christ is the word of God which God put in Mary and which is a Spirit from him.” In the *Muzzle*, by contrast, he adds in key details in his citation of the same passage:

“The Messiah is *‘Īsā ibn Maryam*, that is Jesus son of Mary, messenger of God, and is his word which he put into Mary, and a spirit from him.”³⁵ This rendering in the *Muzzle* is more accurate, changing the Latin verb *posuit*, “he put,” used in *On the Sect*, into *deposuit*, “he deposited or gave to,” thus more accurately rendering in the *Muzzle* the Arabic *alqāhā*, “he put or said it forth.” His latter citation is also more complete, adding back the detail that the Messiah is *rasūl Allāh*, God’s messenger. Perhaps most important, Martí makes an attempt in the later work, albeit a feeble one, at transliteration by giving the name of Jesus phonetically, as it is in the Qur’ān, *‘Īsā ibn Maryam*.

Martí uses the transliteration of sounds as a way of evoking the foreignness of the works he cites as proof, and in this way begins a process of approximating what he sees as the original form of his sources. Among the hundred-odd citations of the Talmud and Midrash in the *Capistrum*, not to mention the hundreds more from the Hebrew Bible itself, there are dozens of passages that go beyond translation and attempt to evoke the original in this clumsy way by means of interspersed and ever more abundant transliteration. He continues on this path of development in the *Dagger*, where he substitutes most of his transliterations with full citations of original texts in their original alphabets. Followed consistently with careful, punctilious translations, these transcriptions *ad litteram* pretend to embrace a mastery not only of content, but also of form. To offer one example of his changing practice of citation in his later writing, we can compare his use of a single passage from the Babylonian Talmud in the *Muzzle* and again a decade later in the *Dagger*. The passage (BT Rosh Ha-Shanah 2b), which concerns his reading of the chronological prophecies in the book of Daniel, is cited to support his understanding of the Hebrew words for *day* and *year*. In the *Muzzle*, he explains, “It reads in the beginning of the tractate Rosh Ha-Shanah...*ve-yom ehad ha-shanah*, that is, the first day of the year, *‘asah shanah*, that is, is calculated as a year.”³⁶ Compared with his practice in his earlier works, we see that he has moved from a transliteration of the title only, to a transliteration of both title and text placed *within* his translation. If we compare this with the same citation as it appears in the *Dagger*, we see that he dispenses almost altogether with the clumsy recourse to transliteration and simply transcribes the original verse in full in its original, Hebrew script, and then follows this with his translation into Latin. While the *Dagger* multiplies the amount of sources at least fourfold compared with the *Muzzle*, it also moves ever closer, through such practices, to the non-Latin form of its citations by replacing interspersed transliteration with actual citation in original scripts. Although the results most often muddle rather than clarify the meaning of the original, they point to his increasing attention to the

language of his citations and his growing dissatisfaction with mere translation into Latin. This dissatisfaction is further evinced in other novel practices within the *Dagger*, such as occasional citation of passages from the Gospels not only in Latin but also in Hebrew translations, or in a string of citations from the Qurʾān in Arabic written in Hebrew characters alongside his Latin renditions.³⁷ Compared to Martí's earlier writing, the citation practices in the *Dagger* reflect the culmination of this trend of representing non-Christian sources with greater and greater accuracy in what the author understood to be their most "original," or at least their most "Jewish," form.

Martí's comments about language in both the *Muzzle* and the *Dagger* suggest that the central motivation of his increasingly frequent and precise engagement with original material from Arabic and Hebrew is preclusive, a tactic used to forestall any claims by potential adversaries charging him with a lack of real knowledge of the original texts being cited. Martí in fact explicitly addresses this issue in the opening of the *Muzzle*:

There are two ways that the Jews impugn the accuracy of a text, either by using subterfuge [*subterfugiant*] or by introducing their own false ideas against it, namely, by saying that it is not thus in Hebrew [*non sic haberi in Hebraeo*]...or if they concede the text [is thus], by saying that it should not be understood or explained thusly. With the help of God, therefore, I will translate these authorities word for word, and, against the first [point], I will sometimes put the commentary on the words of their Rabbis within [my text] or outside it in the margin. Against the second [point], I have collected from the Talmud and from other books held to be authentic among them [*ex aliis libris authenticis apud eos*] certain sayings of their ancient teachers who adduce or expound authorities of this type...which I will intersperse [in the body of the text] or put in the margin, translating them, word for word to the degree possible, in like manner.³⁸

While these remarks certainly put Martí's work in the context of engagement with Jews, there is no indication that such engagement is anything but textual and learned and intended as a refutation rather than a missionizing appeal to conversion. It is noteworthy that Martí explicitly addresses his use not only of translation and the placement of citations (and transliterated passages) but also of the original, transcribed language of his sources. He elaborates this same approach in the prologue to the *Dagger of Faith*, defending his eschewal of Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible:

Furthermore, in bringing forth the authority of the text, whenever the Hebrew text will be taken up, I will not follow the Septuagint or any other [translation]. What will seem even more presumptuous, I will not revere Jerome in this, nor will I avoid the improper use, within tolerable limits, of the Latin language, so that, as often as possible, I will translate the truth, word for word, of those [passages] found in the Hebrew. In this way, the wide and spacious way of subterfuge [*lata ualde spaciosaque subterfugendi uia*] is precluded to the false-speaking Jews. Hardly will they be able to say that [the text] is not thus among them.³⁹

To counter such alleged Jewish “tricks” (*dolos*), he writes, “It will be best if this pamphlet [be written] not only in Latin, but also in Hebrew, and that one have the knowledge of reading Hebrew [aloud], even if he cannot understand it.”⁴⁰

That Martí here distinguishes between the ability to pronounce Hebrew (aloud) and the ability to understand it gives us an important insight into his conception of language. As he says, the language itself, not the understanding of the writer who cites it, is an effective response to the counterarguments of Jews. He ranks the written form and sound of the Hebrew above its meaning in the process of the struggle against Jewish doubts. Following this hierarchy, he developed an increasingly careful and punctilious methodology in which he strove to approximate what he saw as the most authentic and familiar form of his cited authorities. He did this first through translation (evident in *On the Sect* and the *Explanation*), then through transliteration (which he employs to a much larger degree in the *Muzzle*), and finally through transcription of original languages and alphabets (evident in the *Dagger*). The development of his ideas in this order tells us also that he not only valued the form over the content, but he also valued the shape over the sound. In his final stance in the *Dagger*, the letter of the text in its original alphabet, which he transcribes for virtually every single Hebrew pericope, becomes the ultimate token of authenticity, standing in for the voice of the convert as the foundational testimony of his authority. As he states in the opening to the *Dagger of Faith*, “No plague may be more effective at harming than a familiar enemy.”⁴¹

Martí’s attitude toward language expressed a new rhetoric of authenticity in Christian apologetics that aimed to move ever closer to an elusive affirmation of theological identity in the terms of non-Christian difference. In this, the theological expression of Christian identity came to find its most apposite vocabulary in foreignness, and authority increasingly depended, in its justification of that identity, on an appeal to alterity. This attempt at constructing authoritative proof runs parallel to the twelfth-century efforts to claim authenticity

through personal testimony and the narration of conversion. In Martí's conception, script itself has the power to evoke authentic identity, and in the context of his triumphalist project, the invocation of a script constitutes the means for the hijacking of a whole Scripture, and the alphabet itself begins to take the place of the imagined hermeneutical Jew (or Muslim) as a new theological witness to the historical triumph of Christianity. In place of narratives of conversion, we are confronted with meditations on translation. The original text itself, rather than the preconversion self, becomes the ultimate attestation to Christian truth.

This move, in effect, transferred the burden of proof and the struggle with doubt from the imaginary convert to the imagined polemical reader, who was now bound to accept, in place of the convert's authentic testimony, a unity between the original text and its translated and explicated meaning. In his attempt to shift the foundation of proof from personal testimony to linguistic authenticity, however, Martí seemed to some of his fellow Christian readers only to replace one source of ambiguity with another. As he came to realize over the course of his career, the quest for authority in authenticity requires interpretive choices about what authenticity means, about whether it is an absolute, objective rule of translation or a phenomenal, subjective effect of presentation. Over the course of his evolving use of translation, transliteration, and transcription, Martí became increasingly aware that, in the zero-sum game of religious polemic, "no plague is more effective at damaging" than a failure to marshal the necessary *auctoritas* and control its potentially subversive and self-defeating ambiguity. The hierarchy of values that led him, in contemplating that ambiguity, to elevate the importance of mere sounds above their meaning and of letters above words pushed him to include original rabbinical texts in their original (non-Latin) alphabets, and also led him to imagine that his case would be stronger if it were expressed "not only in Latin, but also in Hebrew," an ideal that was the logical conclusion of his policy of original language citation but which he was unable to fulfill. By making his arguments dependent on the ambiguities of translation, Martí grounded his entire rhetorical edifice on a perpetually unsteady foundation, one that made language, like religious identity premised on abrogation and replacement, seem unstable and ultimately untranslatable.

A SELF-MADE CONVERT: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF RAMON LLULL

In the decades after Martí's activity, two Christian authors, Abner/Alfonso and the Catalan polymath Ramon Llull (d. 1316), pursued this

ideal even further, including original non-Christian sources in their texts (through translation, transliteration of original sounds, or transcription of original alphabets), and actually composing their books in the language of their opponents. Neither figure, however, simply followed Martí's model, but instead each adapted the use of language to different disputational strategies. Llull founded what has been called a language "school," Miramar, in Mallorca in 1276, for the study of Arabic, although such titles exaggerate the status of what was little more than a cluster of a few eager Christians. He effectively petitioned Pope Clement V at the Council of Vienne in 1314 to mandate language programs at numerous European universities to teach Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic (although in both cases, his efforts bore little immediate fruit in the study of languages).⁴² He is known to have composed over 265 works (not counting the many unauthenticated titles attributed to him), including texts in Latin and Catalan and a few in Arabic (now lost).⁴³ Although he seems to follow logically from Martí's model of language study as a tool of religious argumentation, he was in fact very critical of Martí's methods and approached the use of original languages not as a tool for establishing authority or appealing to authenticity but as a way to facilitate understanding.

Rejecting the approach of authors like Martí who based their claims on an appeal to authority, Llull used language to convince rather than subdue or silence his non-Christian audiences. His theoretical approach seems at a distance to have more in common with the approach of Thomas Aquinas, whose *Summa contra gentiles* is virtually devoid of postbiblical Jewish sources. Unlike Aquinas, however, Llull actively pursued confrontation with non-Christian audiences, including travel to North Africa in an attempt to dispute with local Muslims. Llull does not refer to Aquinas but explicitly criticizes Martí on no fewer than five occasions for what he saw as an ineffective and incorrect argumentative method, faulting him for not being able to prove the truth of Christianity rationally when asked to do so by the king of Tunisia.⁴⁴ Llull criticized Martí in the *Book of the End* (*Liber de Fine*) as "one of those who could do good and are sent out to do so, but do not do good, and [it is] as if it were entirely overlooked by them [*quasi ab illis penitus est neglectum*]." ⁴⁵

Llull's criticism of Martí helps shed additional light on Martí's method and his approach to disputation. In the *Book on the Acquisition of the Holy Land* (*Liber de Acquisitione Terrae Sanctae*), Llull describes how "a certain Christian religious well-versed in Arabic [*bene in arabico litteratus*]" disputed with the king of Tunis. After proving "by customs and examples [*per mores et exempla*]" that Islam was erroneous and false and prompting the king to plan to renounce his

religion and convert along with his whole kingdom if the Christian (Martí) could prove the truth of Christianity to him, the Christian declared, “The faith of the Christian cannot be proven, but here is the creed expressed in Arabic: just believe it [*Fides Christianorum non potest probari, sed ecce symbolum in arabico expositum; credas ipsum*].” This peremptory call to unproven faith prompted the king to denounce the Christian for leaving him with no religion at all, since he had disproved Islam and could not prove Christianity.⁴⁶ This well-known anecdote shows that, from Llull’s perspective, the essence of Martí’s approach to other religions was based on polemic without apologetic, disproving his opponent’s faith without offering proof of one’s own. In Llull’s characterization, Martí’s approach to missionizing entails presenting, attacking, and dismissing other religions and then providing assertions about Christianity that take for granted its truth. In another version of the same story (this one in the *Liber de convenientia fidei et intellectus in obiecto*), the Muslim king responds to Martí’s call to simply believe by stating, “That is no proof [*probabilitas*], but simply an affirmation [*positivum*],” thus pointing to what constitutes for Llull the essence of apologetic rather than missionizing argumentation.⁴⁷ Likewise, the last version of the story claims that Martí faced a similar challenge from “a certain Jew” in Barcelona. Again unable to prove his religion compellingly, he was baffled by the obduracy of the unconvinced Jew: “The Friar responded that he could not understand why the Jew continued as if our law was to be scorned as improbable and untrue.”⁴⁸

Part of Llull’s criticism of Martí stems from his belief that Christianity can and should be proven with necessary reasons rather than authoritative textual support. In Harvey Hames’s words, “Llull understood that polemic based on authoritative texts was pointless because each side could remain entrenched in their own hermeneutics and would not have to come to grips with the real issues.”⁴⁹ As a result, Llull seems to make use of very few authorities, and modern readers are often frustrated by his consistent failure to name his sources. Although he seems to soften his firm rejection of the use of authorities in his later works concerning engagement with Judaism,⁵⁰ the overwhelming majority of his writing follows a philosophical methodology that was at odds with Martí’s reliance on textual *auctoritates*, authentic or not. Even in his early work, the *Libre de contemplació en Deu* (*Book of Contemplation of God*), he affirms, “If one sees that [one’s opponent] is a man of crude understanding and not subtle, he can bring him from his error with authorities and miracles of saints [*ab auctoritats e ab miracles de sants*] that make him believe, which he will not do with reasons or natural arguments. For a man of crude understanding is closer to faith than reason.... When a subtle

man disputes...with another subtle man...he should dispute with him with syllogizing reasons...because he can lead a subtle man to truth better with reasons than with faith or authorities.”⁵¹ In most of his later oeuvre, he associates authorities with faith, not reason, listing *auctoritas* in his *Short Art for the Discovery of the Law* (*Ars brevis, quae est de inventione iuris*) as part of a single category of the foundations of belief that also includes opinion, suspicion, custom, conjecture, and testimony. Authority, like all of these foundations, is a force of “positive” or statutory, man-made law and not natural reason or demonstrative syllogism.⁵² His attack on Martí is an attack on Martí’s reliance on the particularism of authority rather than the universalism of reason.

This rejection of *auctoritas* as a grounds for apodictic argument is part of his more general rejection of the universal validity of positive over natural law or reason and is the foundation of Llull’s elaborate system of rational explanation known as the *Art*. Llull’s *Art*, or as he called it in some places, the “General Art for Finding Truth” (*Ars compendiosa inveniendi veritatem*), is a structural method or practice for discovering and demonstrating truth, based on his conception of the rational coherence of the universe. For Llull, all branches of knowledge and investigation reveal the same universal truth, and his *Art* is structured as a means of linking those insights and methods through comparison and analogy. At the center of the *Art*, which he developed throughout his hundreds of works in multiple forms—both simple and staggeringly complex, both visual and textual, both logical and allegorical—is a concept of the coherence and concinnity of existence in which all aspects of *being* correspond in a meaningful and systematic way. Consequently, the path of discovering and *knowing* the truth that inheres in being also follows a method of correspondences and analogies, and in this way Llull’s *Art* prescind from his contemporaries’ Aristotelian concepts of causal logic and knowledge and instead resembles a Platonic worldview. Not a speculative philosophy but a pragmatic and idiosyncratic combination of theology, philosophy, ontology, and ethics clothed in a variety of changeable rhetorical trappings, Llull’s *Art* is as distant from both traditional scholasticism and nominalist philosophy as it is from a traditional medieval conception of the exclusivism of proof through *auctoritas*. While Llull does not reject the validity of authority per se, he does reject it as a foundation for argument and proof, and in the context of the implicit Christian apologetic permeating every aspect of his *Art*—holding that *Christian* truth was the fullest expression of the *universal* truth that was immanent in all being—this rejection of authority in favor of proof through analogy makes him the polar opposite of Ramon Martí.⁵³

Despite his vehement rejection of Martí's approach to non-Christians and his eschewal of testimony along with authority, Llull does produce a testimony of his own that serves to authorize, in a way, his rational methodology, his much celebrated autobiographical *Vita Coetanea* (*Contemporary Life*). Written late in the summer of 1311 at the request, as is explained at the beginning of the text, "of certain monks who were friends of his [*quorundam suorum amicorum religiosorum deuictus instantia*]"—probably the Carthusian monks of Vauvert in Paris—this serves as one of the most elaborate theological conversion stories of the later Middle Ages. Apparently compiled first in Latin by others but based on Llull's dictation—he "narrated this and allowed [it] to be written"—and then translated into Catalan later in the fourteenth century, the work recounts Llull's "conversion to penitence [*conuersione sua ad poenitentiam*]" from a life "given to composing worthless songs and poems [in *uanis cantilenis seu carminibus componendis*] and to doing other licentious things" to his lifelong dedication to study, apology, and disputation.⁵⁴

Although the *Vita* has become a standard reference for virtually all scholars interested in Llull, it is generally used only as an introduction to his life, a source to be mined for biographical facts.⁵⁵ In what follows, I attempt to steer away from this sort of reading and instead propose considering the text as a framing device for Llull's other books, a conversion narrative that authorizes, mostly *a posteriori*, his vast literary edifice. Although he explicitly rejects both testimony and textual authority as the basis for rhetorical appeal and conversionary debate, his story serves to authenticate his authorial voice as a Christian apologist and anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish polemicist, and does so in a way that is remarkably similar to earlier convert-polemicists. Llull's *Vita*, I propose, marks a point at which the focus on language and translation seen in earlier thirteenth-century authors such as Martí begins to be fused with a renewed emphasis on conversion as a narrated story.

The quasi-hagiographic fiction of the *Life* is structured in familiar terms as the account of a night apparition, which he initially resisted and ignored:

One night he was sitting in his bed, about to compose and write in his vulgar tongue a song to a lady whom he loved with a foolish love [*amore fatuo*]; and as he began to write this song, he looked to his right and saw our Lord Jesus Christ on a cross, as if suspended in midair. This sight filled him with fear; and, leaving what he was doing, he retired to bed and went to sleep. Upon arising the next day, he returned to his usual vanities without giving the vision a further thought. It was not until almost a week later, however, in the same place as before, and at almost exactly the same hour,

when he was preparing to work on and finish the aforementioned song, that the Lord appeared to him on the cross, just as before. He was even more frightened than the first time, and retired to bed and fell asleep as he had done before.⁵⁶

Llull relates that he continued this cycle of dream, fear, and heedlessness for a number of days, until he had the same vision under the same circumstances for a fifth time. After spending the following night in prayer and sleeplessness (in comparison to the previous nights, when he ignored what he saw) he “at last...understood with certainty that God wanted him, Ramon, to leave the world and dedicate himself totally to the service of Christ.”⁵⁷ This realization leads Llull immediately to believe that the best way to do this would be by “converting to His worship and service the Saracens who in such numbers surround the Christians on all sides.” Soon after, “a certain impetuous and all-encompassing [*uehemens ac implens*] notion entered his heart: that later on he would have to write a book, the best in the world, against the errors of unbelievers.”⁵⁸

The bulk of what follows is taken up with the description of these efforts and the details of the legion of books he does write, but Llull’s introductory conversion scene frames his mission with an unexpected statement that “he realized he had none of the knowledge [*scientiam*] necessary for such an undertaking [*negotium*].” With this confession of ignorance, Llull thus seems to differentiate himself from the conversion texts of the twelfth century, as well as from the contemporary texts of Martí. Rather than appealing to his mastery and preeminence in his former knowledge, Llull affirms the opposite: he had barely studied grammar in Latin and knew no Arabic, and “this thought worried him and he began to feel very sad [*unde mente consternatus multum coepit dolere*].”⁵⁹ Yet this claim of ignorance can still be taken as a direct imitation of the trope of preconversion authenticity. Just as Moses/Petrus painted himself as “more zealous in the law than all of his contemporaries” and Judah/Herman as “most faithful [*fidelissimum*]” in being “a Jew of the Jews [*Iudeum ex Iudeis*]” so Llull claims that before his conversion he had “scarcely learned more than a bare minimum of grammar” and paints his former identity as “imbued with his worldly life and licentiousness [*imbutus uita et lasciui saeculari*].”⁶⁰ Following his models, Llull’s claim to ignorance forms part of the construction of his postconversion identity as the *opposite* of his preconversion self. Formerly, he was wayward and sensualist (and apparently unfaithful to his wife), interested in poetry rather than Scripture, untrained in Latin, Arabic, or rational syllogisms. After his conversion, he eventually becomes a master of argument and language. Rather than poetry, he writes books of

controversy and proof; rather than writing only in the vernacular, he becomes also an author in Latin and Arabic. In opposition to his former ignorance and faithlessness, he later distinguishes himself even among the masters of Paris as one who “offered a wisdom wonderfully confirmed by the high principles of the Christian faith.”⁶¹

Through these carefully constructed oppositions, Llull’s description of his life before his visions of Christ serves to underscore his total transformation into his postconversion self. As this self is the first-person author of his works, this trajectory likewise authenticates his conversion and authorizes his argumentative voice. He follows this initial self-representation with numerous details meant to further authenticate his authorial persona and authorize his apologetic statements. After his Muslim servant and Arabic instructor attacked him and then hanged himself in prison, Llull attributed the suicide to God’s will and protection of him rather than mere fate. Immediately following this, Llull “went up a certain mountain not far from his home, in order to contemplate God,” where “the Lord suddenly illuminated his mind, giving him the form and method for writing the aforementioned book against the errors of the unbelievers.” Llull then “came down from the mountain” and began to write his famed *Art*, thus sanctioning his lifelong anti-Muslim project in the *Art* as a sort of prophetic revelation akin to God’s giving of the tablets to Moses.⁶² Immediately following his descent from the mountain with his *Art* now formed, he met “a young shepherd of cheerful and lovely countenance [*hilaris facie et uenusta*], who in one hour told him as many good things of God and of heavenly matters, especially of angels, and other things, as another ordinary person—or so it seemed to him—would have taken at least two entire days to recount.”⁶³ When the shepherd saw Llull’s books, he “got down on his knees, kissed them fervently, and watered them with his tears,” a blessing that, as Hames has shown, clearly evokes the Kabbalistic trope of being “authorized” as a prophet visited by the prophet Elijah in the person of a shepherd.⁶⁴ Similarly, when he experienced doubts before his mission to North Africa, he experienced a divine revelation of “a tiny light, like a pale star, and from the general area of the star he heard a voice.”⁶⁵ All of these details, framed principally by his conversion experience, serve to establish Llull’s authority as an author. Despite his general avoidance of both testimony and *auctoritates* as the foundation for religious debate, as well as his direct criticism of Martí and his methodology, his conversion in the *Vita Coetanea* follows the pattern of such stories told in the service of doctrine. As in Martí’s writing, Llull’s narrative strives to claim authenticity and authority through the rhetorical appeal to both a former self and its subsequent radical inversion. Despite their pronounced differences on questions of

disputational methodology and the foundation of successful arguments, Lull and Martí share a pronounced concern with the construction of their authority.

As we considered above, Martí's strategy came to rest very heavily on his conception of authenticity in language as a means of claiming apodictic authority. In placing such a heavy value on language, he sought to displace the testimony of the convert as the foundation of authenticity and in its place proffer linguistic expertise as the real essence of authenticity, untainted by the hybrid identity of the convert himself. Despite Lull's quixotic efforts to steer things in another direction, the recognition of non-Christian authority first pursued by Martí as the foundation of Christian apology would become a standard of Western Christian argumentation within only a few decades. As the fourteenth-century Franciscan Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1349), who drew heavily from Martí's writing, explains, "Besides the canonical texts there are also other texts accepted by the Jews as equally authentic, such as the Talmud, because according to them, this scripture does not differ from Holy Scripture.... Likewise the sayings of the Hebrew doctors who glossed the Old Testament are authentic among them.... [A]lthough the texts of this sort—i.e., the Talmud and the glosses of the Hebrew doctors—are in large part false, with them we can still argue effectively against them, since they are accepted by them in the manner described."⁶⁶ A similar understanding of authority was reiterated by Lyra's contemporaries, including the bishop of Mallorca, Gui Terré (Guido Terreni, d. 1342),⁶⁷ and eventually gave way to a notable awareness over the gulf separating the authenticity of written sources and their intrinsic Christian content. Less than a century after Lyra and Terré, Solomon Halevi/Pablo de Santa María distanced himself from Martí's notion of non-Christian authorities by distinguishing, in his *Additions and Scrutiny of Scripture* and also in his Castilian historiographical poem *Seven Ages of the World* (*Siete edades del mundo*), between talmudic or other "apocryphal writing [*escripturas apócrifas*]" and those books that "are not only authentic, but also that are shown to us by Divine Law."⁶⁸ The distinction between merely authentic texts and those that are also divinely ordained is a direct response to the increasingly problematic expansion of the meaning of authority beyond traditional biblical sources.

It is the exploration and exploitation of this problematic fault line between authenticity and authority that defines the work of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid in the fourteenth century, above all in its combined focus, similar to that of Ramon Lull, on linguistic authority and a personal narrative of conversion. A close reading of Abner/Alfonso's corpus, undertaken in the next chapter, will bring the

principal issues of his twelfth- and thirteenth-century predecessors into sharp relief.

The Jargon of Authenticity

Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid and the Paradox of Testimony

Abtrünnig erst bin ich treu. Ich bin du, wenn ich ich bin.
[Only as an apostate am I faithful; I am you when I am myself.]

—PAUL CELAN, “Lob der Ferne” (“Praise of Distance”)

Between the extreme and voluminous examples of Ramon Martí and Ramon Llull, the upheavals occasioned by the incorporation of Aristotelian logic into traditional polemical thought had run their course and driven the pursuit of authority, both through text and logical argument, to an impasse. While Martí had doggedly pushed the expansion of Christian *auctoritas* to its conceptual and linguistic limits, Llull had, in parallel fashion, elaborated the foundations of *ratio* to a rarefied degree of sophistication and complexity, and both had done so over a wide swath of writing (although Llull’s output dwarfs that of Martí, along with every other known medieval controversialist). The impractical difficulty of their works seems to have prevented either man from making any sustained impact on subsequent polemics, although Llull was to enjoy a posthumous popularity in other, more esoteric circles. Most of Martí’s writing never escaped far from the handful of libraries that preserved it for posterity, and its impact on missionary efforts made against Jews and Muslims in later centuries seems to have been meager, although it did enjoy a modest revival among later Christian Hebraists.¹

The intentions and methods of both writers, however, seem to have been carried on by a few later writers in the Crown of Castile in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. While some of Llull’s works were translated into Castilian and disseminated within the Crown of Castile, Martí’s confrontation with postbiblical literature found imitators in the fifteenth century in the *Scrutiny of Scripture* of

Solomon/Pablo, *On the Errors of the Talmud* (*De erroribus Talmuth*) of his protégé, the convert Jerónimo de Santa Fe (Joshua Halorki, d. 1430), and the *Fortress of Faith* (*Fortalitium Fidei*) of Alonso de Espina (d. ca 1491). Bridging these two periods is the unique corpus of works written by the converted Jew Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid. In his work, the thirteenth-century cultivation of what we might term, adapting Theodor Adorno's phrase, a "jargon of authenticity," reached its zenith, both through citation of foreign texts and the invocation of the narrated testimony of converts.

It is serendipitous that among the various works by Abner/Alfonso before and immediately after his conversion, the earliest that has survived in more or less complete form (albeit in translation) is his *Mostrador de justicia*, the fourteenth-century Castilian version of his original Hebrew *Moreh Zedek* (*Teacher of Righteousness*). Not only is the *Teacher* his longest and most complex work, serving as the template for most of his later writing. It also is the work that contains Abner/Alfonso's introductory first-person conversion narrative. The account of his conversion introduces not simply the text of the *Teacher* that follows it, but also his entire corpus of writing. Situated at the head of his work, it defines his very identity for posterity, determining all that followed through the immediacy and personal intimacy of his opening line: "I saw the oppression [*premia*] of the Jews, my people from whom I am descended, who are, in this long captivity, oppressed and broken and burdened [*quexados e quebrantados e angustiados*] heavily by taxes, this people that has lost the honor and glory it once had, which has no help or strength in itself."²

From this seemingly heartfelt opening, Abner/Alfonso works to establish his vital presence within his writing, constructing an image of himself that reflects his personal identification with the belief and worldview of his reader: the Jews are "my people from whom I am descended," not an evil and misguided people but one afflicted and victimized, "oppressed and broken and burdened" and lacking their former "honor and glory." Speaking in a first-person voice to describe not what he thinks but what he "saw," Abner/Alfonso here provides us with the watchword of all of his subsequent writing, the key to understanding his entire project: personal testimony. It is in this light that we can begin to read Abner/Alfonso's conversion account and to understand its place within the wider context of his writing and the tradition in which he inserts himself. In this chapter, I undertake such a reading in light of his overall strategy of personal testimony and direct appeal to his reader as a fellow Jew. Viewed against the backdrop of medieval writing, Abner/Alfonso can be seen as a convergence and culmination of trends running through the Christian texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: both the use of

conversion to stabilize argumentation in the face of shifting notions of authority and the focus on language as a marker of identity and a touchstone of faith. His vivid authorial presence is not only in evidence in his conversion story but spills over into the formulas of his explanations and permeates his entire text at virtually every level. In this way, the *Teacher* provides an *epitome* of the use of the conversion narrative as a polemical device and a rhetorical tool.

At the same time, his writing marks an important departure from those trends in its conflation of argument and frame, theological content and narrative voice. Just as the examples of Moses/Petrus Alfonsi, Judah/Herman of Cologne, Ramon Llull, and others manifest provocative ambiguities engendered by the literary devices of their texts, Abner/Alfonso's *Teacher*, as the most elaborate and complex such example considered in this study, is characterized throughout by the internal dissonance between its form and content. The complexity of his arguments and sources is matched by the ambiguities inherent in his rhetorical strategies and literary framing. Ironically, his work, which follows a non-Augustinian model of conversion and exegesis, elaborates both the linguistic ambitions of the thirteenth century and also the literary form of the twelfth. Together within the same work, these strategies, when expressed in literary guise, begin to work at cross-purposes. Abner/Alfonso's work is thus not only a culmination of the trends of the previous two centuries of disputational writing. It is also a conclusion and collapse of those efforts, marking a turning point in the process of rethinking the nature of authority through narration that began two centuries earlier.

BETWEEN CITATION AND TESTIMONY

Despite the marked continuities with earlier texts, Abner/Alfonso's work stands out in one important way: its language. Unlike virtually all earlier anti-Jewish writers, Abner/Alfonso composed entirely, or almost entirely, in Hebrew. His *Teacher*, although it now survives only in Castilian, is distinguished as the first and longest anti-Jewish Christian treatise composed in Hebrew. He is equally unique because he continued to compose anti-Jewish works in Hebrew for decades after his conversion, suggesting that his use of Hebrew was not a sign of his slow acculturation to a Christian intellectual culture but instead constituted a critical component of his anti-Jewish strategy. Because he wrote directly in Hebrew, Abner/Alfonso provoked abundant responses and counterattacks by at least a dozen Jewish writers—many more than most Christian apologists, including Martí—and his impact on later Jewish writing extends over two centuries after his

death.³ Few other anti-Jewish treatises, not even Moses/Petrus Alfonsi's immensely popular *Dialogues*, ever enjoyed the Jewish readership mustered by Abner-Alfonso's writing.

Despite this impact, very little information survives about the historical figure Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid beyond what he claims in his personal narrative, although we can piece together a rough chronology of his life based on a handful of circumstantial facts. It is known that he composed his first anti-Jewish work, the now-lost *Book of the Wars of the Lord* (*Sefer Milḥamot Adonai*), in Hebrew and was asked to translate it into Castilian by Blanche (Blanca) de Portugal, a granddaughter of King Alfonso X of Castile and Leon and resident at the Convent of Las Huelgas of Burgos. Given that Blanca died in 1321, this places the beginning of Abner/Alfonso's public life as a Christian before this time.⁴ Beyond this, it is known that the Provençal philosopher Moses Narboni claims to have run into Abner/Alfonso, whom he calls "a sage among the most singular of his generation," sometime "at the end of his days." Given Narboni's travels, such an encounter could only have occurred between 1344 and 1348, placing Abner/Alfonso's death sometime around or shortly after this time.⁵

After becoming Christian, Abner/Alfonso spent the two and a half decades until his death engaged in a religious contest with his former community of friends and students. Although he wrote in Hebrew, his writings now survive in a tangled, multilingual miscellany of original texts in Hebrew, contemporary translations in Castilian, and fifteenth-century citations in Latin.⁶ Some texts survive in both Hebrew and Castilian (his response to his former student, Isaac Pollegar, known as the *Response to the Blasphemer*, as well as three of his letters), others only in Castilian (the *Teacher*, his philosophical meditation *Offering of Zeal*, and his short treatise *Book of the Law*), and still others only in Hebrew (his response to the replies to his three letters).⁷ Abner/Alfonso is known to have personally translated his *Wars of the Lord*, but his role in the subsequent Castilian versions of his books, including that of the *Teacher*, is less certain.⁸ In addition to this extant body of works, at least ten more works are believed to have been written but are now lost, and at least five more beyond these have been tentatively attributed to him.⁹ Of all of his undisputed writing, the *Teacher* is the most developed and the most important, and because virtually all of his subsequent output draws on and develops ideas first presented there, any discussion of his legacy must situate the *Teacher* and its opening conversion narrative as the interpretive lodestone of his entire oeuvre.

The *Teacher of Righteousness* (Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. Espagnol 43, ff. 12r-342v) is arranged into a short preliminary section two

folios in length, followed by a fourteen-folio chapter-by-chapter description of the contents to follow.¹⁰ The main text contains ten principal chapters of varying length, each consisting of a back-and-forth “dialogue” between a Christian figure, called the Teacher (*Mostrador*), and a Jewish disputant, the Rebel (*Rebelle*). The central topic of the *Teacher* is the identity of the Messiah according to traditional Jewish sources. Like Dominican writers of the later thirteenth century, Abner/Alfonso maintains that Jewish sources support the Christian belief in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and that Jews have misinterpreted and misunderstood their own authorities regarding this tradition.

What is remarkable about Abner/Alfonso’s work in comparison with other anti-Jewish writing is that, unlike most Christian apologists before him, he is no longer addressing a Christian readership but composes his works explicitly for Jews to read. The fact that he wrote virtually all of his books in Hebrew is manifest proof that it is more than a mere trope of disputational rhetoric when he claims, “I wanted to compose this book, which I called *Teacher of Righteousness*...in order to show the true faith...to the Jews, who have need of it, as I was told [in my dream], and in order to respond to all the counter-arguments and doubts [las *contradiçiones e las dubdas*], or most of them, that every rebel or contradictory Jew [*judio rrebelde e contrdezidor*] can make to our words.”¹¹ His stated intention is to show “the truth” to the Jews, and this affects his choice to write in Hebrew and also determines the sources he draws from. He specifies that because his “words and arguments here are not with Christians, but with contrary Jews,” he does not cite verses from the Bible “according to how they are translated to Latin among Christians, but rather according to how they are understood in the Hebrew language.”¹²

The other unique aspects of the text take on greater significance in light of these statements. Not only did Abner/Alfonso draw from the Hebrew Bible rather than the Vulgate, but he also went to great lengths to couch his anti-Jewish claims in terms that would seem familiar to Jewish readers. He deliberately avoids using non-Jewish sources the majority of the time, and when he does, they come mostly from classical and Arabic philosophical authors who had already been translated into Hebrew and were known among the intellectual Jews of Spain and Provence. With his wealth of citations, he shows a profound knowledge of major rabbinical themes and ideas in the Talmud and major midrashim, and also of other examples from many other periods of Jewish writing, including major works by figures such as Rashi, David Kimḥi, Nahmanides, Maimonides (including Maimonides’ legal discussion of commandments), Sa’adya Ga’on, Moses Chiquitilla, and Abraham Ibn ‘Ezra’, as well as works of

medieval historiography such as the *Sefer Yosippon*, the *Book of Tradition* (*Sefer ha-Qabalah*) of Ibn Daud, and even apocalyptic works such as the *Sefer Zerubavel*. He also cites directly from twelfth-century Jewish anti-Christian literature, such as the Hebrew *Book of Nestor* and the Jewish-Christian debate within Joseph Kimḥi's (d. 1170) *Book of the Covenant* (*Sefer ha-Berit*), among others. Because of this plethora of citation and allusion, Abner/Alfonso's work is an unexploited treasure trove of rabbinical literature and medieval Jewish writing, and a full consideration of his Jewish sources is a major scholarly desideratum.¹³

By rejecting even Christian texts that would seem to naturally support his objective (such as the *Dialogue against the Jews* of Moses/Petrus Alfonsi, whom he criticizes), Abner/Alfonso seeks to paint his reading as tacitly Jewish or sympathetic to a Jewish perspective. He aims to transform the stark opposition between Christian and Jew, so common in theological dialogues, into an opposition between those who seek truth (such as himself) and those who merely follow tradition (such as most Jews). The wealth and variety of his material supports this shift in perspective by attempting to show not only that his arguments make use of Jewish sources, but that they ultimately derive from them as well. This fundamental difference sets Abner/Alfonso's work apart from previous polemics that sought to make use of Jewish authorities.

One of the subtle ways Abner/Alfonso attempts to frame his anti-Jewish vision as essentially Jewish is through his style. Yitzhak Baer has remarked that Abner/Alfonso's style can be seen as "midrashic" in its way of stringing together source citations and its constant and oftentimes meandering disquisition that includes opposing or contradictory considerations, putting him "in a class with the aggadists or eschatological writers like R. Abraham b. Ḥiyya and the contemporary mystics rather than with the Christian and Jewish schoolmen."¹⁴ What one historian has called Ramon Martí's "diaphanous scholastic order" cannot be found in Abner/Alfonso's organization.¹⁵ In the opening of the *Teacher*, he even feigns discomfort with presenting a table of contents because it involves imposing more order on his text than he prefers, claiming, "I took pains to compose this book in this way, although I am not at all used to it [*non so guisadopara tanto*]."¹⁶ Despite his efforts at imposing order, his chapters are often extremely long (chapters 7 and 10, for example, are each nearly the length of the entire *Dialogue* of Moses/Petrus Alfonsi), and the individual paragraphs vary in length from a few lines to over fifty pages. This lack of excessively rigid order served as part of his strategy of speaking directly to his Jewish reader in as natural a voice and style as possible, while simultaneously trying to

overwhelm his reader with an irrefutable legion of citations. In Jonathan Hecht's words, "There is an ease of presentation in his Hebrew works that is appealing to the Hebrew reader."¹⁷ This appealing ease of presentation is, moreover, only one part of a wideranging strategy of authorial manipulation aimed to blur the boundaries between converter and converted, polemicized and polemicist.

Abner/Alfonso's rhetorical strategies respond to a central concern of the thirteenth-century writers considered in the previous chapter: the inauthenticity of using non-Christian authorities without believing in them. Martí first addresses this vexing question in the *Muzzle of the Jews*, arguing that the Jews "pretend extensively that we ought and cannot fairly adduce something from the Talmud on our behalf against them, unless we were to believe in the entire Talmud and accept it all."¹⁸ While Martí responded to this problem by adding even more sources to back up his claims and by focusing on the authentic and punctilious representation and translation of those sources, Abner/Alfonso follows a notably different course. Although he does extend Martí's linguistic focus by writing in Hebrew rather than Latin and does saturate his arguments with many of the same rabbinical authorities as Martí, these moves are not part of a factitious authenticity handled with the seemingly objective distance of linguistic exactitude. Instead, they are the means of a subjective rhetorical appeal on the basis of a likeness he claims to share with his reader. Abner/Alfonso blurs the line between himself and his reader by implying that he in fact does believe in and accepts the Talmud, despite its "errors" and "distortions," and that this is the basis of his conversion and Christian faith.

There are numerous similar steps that Abner/Alfonso takes to effect this authorial persona in his work, including the organization of the text into the common dialogue form. In the context of his stated goal of presenting his anti-Jewish ideas directly to Jews in a pseudo-Jewish form, the generic form of a dialogue takes on much greater significance because it mirrors the real confrontation implicitly staged by the reading of the text itself. In particular, the debate between the Christian *Moreh* and the Jewish *Mored* directly evokes Joseph Kimḥi's anti-Christian *Book of the Covenant*, between a Christian (called a *min*, or "heretic," in Hebrew) and a Jew (called a *ma'amin*, or "faithful one").

Because Abner/Alfonso's personal identification with the Teacher in this dialogue is so obvious, the other examples when the Teacher directly addresses the Rebel outside the parameters of the topic under discussion can all be seen as moments when the author himself directly addresses his Jewish reader; examples are invocations of the

Teacher such as “Look you, Rebel, how this sage explained this subject to you and to other Jews who are just like you” and “You, brother Jew, I beg you that you put your understanding towards the service of God.”¹⁹ One of the most fascinating moments of this sort when the edifice of the dialogue and the role of Teacher and Rebel fade to the background and “the Jew” is directly admonished comes near the middle of the manuscript. It is not clear if the Teacher is speaking to the Rebel, the author is speaking to his audience, or Alfonso the Christian is speaking to Abner, his former Jewish self:

And now you, Jew, pay attention [*ten mientes*] to the words put forth that I showed you here, if you are among the men with understanding who are very used to working in true sciences.... If you are not used to studying the books of the sciences and knowing all that ancient books said about these profound and subtle things [*estas cosas ffundas e sotiles*] achieved by the studies of the great sages, “remove ill from your heart and pluck malice from your flesh” and “make your ear like a mill hopper” [*rriedra sanna de tu coraçon e tuelle malicia de tu carne e ffaz a tu oreja como la tolva del molino*] in order to receive and give yourself over to those who know more than you, and “incline your ear and hear the words of the sages, and put your heart according to my understanding,” and do not continue to argue and contradict their understandings.²⁰

The Teacher encourages the Jew who is doubting and confused to study more intensely the sages of his own tradition, just as Abner/Alfonso claims he did in response to his dreams. Just as he affirms that he wrote other works, such as his *Response to the Blasphemer*, “to honor God and not to increase disputes in Israel,” so he characterizes his goal in the *Teacher* as encouraging Jews to study harder in search of truth.²¹ His ultimate goal is to lead his readers to question their faith and turn to his Christological explanations as an alternative way to understand Jewish tradition.

He concludes his advice thus: “If one does not have a great understanding to know good and evil, and truth and falsehood, and is doubting about an issue, let him go to the sages to learn from them. And if he finds a contradiction among the sages, let him strive and work [*punne e trabaje*] to understand by himself, and let him open his heart to understand in their words where the truth lies [*a quál cabo acuesta la verdat*].”²² This candid passage gives a clear picture of Abner/Alfonso’s strategy and of his attitude toward his Jewish reader. The entire façade of the point-by-point disputation fades to the background in this passage, and the narrative form separating the voice of the Teacher from Abner/Alfonso’s authorial voice is dropped by this direct appeal to the Jewish Rebel and the Jewish reader. His

primary goal is not only to encourage others to explore their faith and come to understand the authorities of their tradition, but also to encourage them to seek truth from all corners and to be open to things they find from sources not accepted in Jewish tradition. His appeal is made of two parts: the first calls upon the Jew to “pay attention” and study more assiduously the writings of the sages within the Jewish tradition. The second is to “strive and work by yourself” if contradictions or difficulties in the teachings of the sages are found. He does not impugn the Jewish tradition as false, but instead encourages the Jewish reader to study more diligently.²³

The Teacher accepts the authoritative status of Jewish sources and makes the claim not only that they support Christian teachings—a claim made previously by various Dominicans—but also that Christians actually believe in the authorities that are accepted among Jews, whereas Jews themselves deny their own authorities. The ultimate appeal is for the Jewish reader to study in search of the truth in order to “truly” accept and follow his own authorities. After presenting a Christian argument that, he claims, is supported by the sayings of Rabbi Akiva, the Teacher says to the Rebel, “I think that you, Jew, also know this, but that out of desire to believe that you will win, pride has forced you to go against your own teachers.”²⁴ In a roundabout way, Abner/Alfonso’s appeal to his reader to be a “better” Jew involves believing more, not less, in the teachings and sources already considered authoritative within Judaism. On the other hand, however, the Teacher pushes the Jewish reader to think of himself apart from his tradition and to see his own understanding as capable of discerning truth above and beyond that of the authorities of his religion. The worst thing, in Abner/Alfonso’s view as it is expressed here, is to “remain in doubt,” an unforgivable sin far graver than the perils of striving alone to resolve doubts or even converting, even if one is in error.

The rhetorical strategy of his appeal involves feigning in a believable way his respect for the intellectual position of his individual reader, a respect that is shown in his general avoidance of direct insults of the sort we see in other polemical texts and in his effort to convince and convert his reader by appealing to his knowledge and understanding.²⁵ By pushing his reader to study more, he encourages the Jew to admit he has doubts and questions of faith. This is the first step in his overall goal of separating the Jew from his tradition and calling him to be open to other, non-Jewish sources. Abner/Alfonso then introduces the possibility that true arguments could come from Christian writers like him. Near the end of [chapter 1](#), the Teacher encourages the Rebel to be open-minded: “When you should find Christians who give some gloss of some verse that

contradicts your opinion, do not pressure yourself to push it away or discard it [non *te apressures a enpuxarla nin a desecharla*] on the basis that other [verses] do not follow that intention—as many Jews did who composed books of disputations against Christians—but look first to see if that argument which they linked to the verse is confirmed as true through philosophical study or the sayings of students of philosophy or the sayings of the sages of the Talmud or others who are authentic [authorities] among you.”²⁶ Not only does he encourage the Jew not to follow Jewish traditions of the rabbinic sages if he should find contradictions or points he does not agree with there. He stresses the relativity of the categories of belief and heresy and says every man must find the truth in tradition on his own because “there is nothing fitting to choose the truth from among the lies except one’s understanding and the weight of reason.”²⁷ In exhorting the Rebel to think for himself, he also encourages him to separate himself from the tradition of anti-Christian Hebrew authors and apologists (Jacob ben Reuben, Joseph Kimḥi, Meir ben Simeon of Narbonne, and others cited in the text) who might provide him with a defense from Christian attacks. He speaks as an individual and addresses his reader as an individual, all in an effort to isolate his reader from the defenses against unorthodox appeals that would normally be at his disposal within his community.

It is ironic that part of this strategy of isolation stems from Abner/Alfonso’s rhetoric appealing to a sense of continuity and tradition within the Jewish community, while he also works to undermine and disrupt that continuity by cajoling each reader into thinking of himself apart from his teachers. Rather than attacking the rabbinical writing or his Jewish reader directly, however, he instead faults the early rabbis who, he claims, knew that Jesus was the expected Messiah but refused to teach others what they discerned in Scriptures and traditional authorities. They did this not out of ignorance but out of their ill will against Jesus.²⁸ This deliberate concealment by the original sages was then perpetuated by later Jewish leaders and handed down as tradition within the Jewish community, and it is up to the righteous individual Jew to break this transmission and fix his own tradition. He appeals to the individual reader as being an essential part of a sacred chain of *Jewish* tradition, one who can choose to pass on either truth or falsehood to his heirs, and he places the responsibility for the correct understanding of later generations of one’s offspring on the individual Jewish reader’s decision to sort out his doubts.

Just as he insists, in his later response to Isaac Pollegar in the *Response to the Blasphemer*, that his aim is “to remove...that which keeps you in heresy,” painting his opponent as an assailant of the faith

and himself as its defender, so in the *Teacher* he depicts himself as one of those “few sages, who are pillars of the Law, because they sustain the received faith” against those who seek to “undo it.”²⁹ Indeed, not to “respond to those who contradict” the truth would be “a dishonor of the Law and a dishonor of those who hold it.” It is clear from statements made elsewhere in the *Teacher* and in his other works that Abner/Alfonso conceives of himself as one of the upholders of the law who preserve its secret meaning.³⁰ In this he compares himself to a doctor who does more good than harm, even if he accidentally causes some patients to die.³¹ He justifies this logic by claiming that it is better to do what one believes is God’s will and make some mistakes than not to strive for truth at all.

The implicit argument is that, ironically, in order to preserve Jewish tradition, the individual Jew must follow him and break away from it and find truth on his own, or else the legacy of his doubt and disbelief will be perpetuated and amplified in later Jews, becoming “a stain [*manziella*] which he received through the legacy of his parents.”³² Bending the language of family and tradition to fit his call for the individual search for truth, he asserts, citing the Talmud, that “every man is his own intimate relation and partisan and relative to himself [*çercano e vadero e pariente de ssí mismo*],” and it is through the individual’s choice to seek truth individually that the community remains faithful and true. He affirms that such doubt is “a deception of the soul for him and for his offspring [*ssimiente*] and for all those who follow him, them and their children and their children’s children forever, [because] ‘all of Israel is responsible, one for another.’”³³ In this subtle series of steps, Abner/Alfonso attempts to transform apostasy from a divisive and destructive force into the only saving grace capable of preserving Judaism.

THE REBELLIOUSNESS OF THE REBEL REVISITED

A point essential to Abner/Alfonso’s appeal is his treatment of the possible reasons why Jews do not accept arguments such as his and resist conversion to Christianity. His views diverge sharply from those of Martí, who always approaches possible Jewish objections by considering how the Christian should respond and by paying careful attention to language and authoritative sources. By contrast, Abner/Alfonso, as part of his appeal as one who claims to understand the situation of the Jews, tries to consider from a meaningful Jewish perspective the reasons why he believes Jews do not convert to Christianity.

This discussion comes in part as a response to the Rebel’s question

of why the sages of the Talmud did not themselves convert to Christianity if they believed in it as the Teacher asserts. “Perhaps,” the Rebel jeers (echoing Paulus Alvarus and Nahmanides), “you believe you understand their words better than they do who said them?”³⁴ In response, the Teacher lists twelve factors that he says keep a man from leaving his religion. These include resistance to change one’s habits later in life, fear of confrontation with one’s coreligionists, desire not to dishonor one’s relatives, difficulty being among strangers, a reluctance to abandon wife and children, economic dependence on one’s neighborhood and community, a general fear of poverty, pride at not wanting to be bested in theological debate, an overly comfortable captivity (for slaves) in which one is not pressured to convert, and modesty about removing one’s clothes to be baptized in front of others (especially if one has some defect or blemish). Most important, no wise man will leave his religion unless he finds both reason to doubt his tradition and an answer to those doubts in a new one: “Not every sage finds those two reasons together.”³⁵ Besides what seem like resonant parallels with Abner/Alfonso’s life—upon becoming Christian, he seems to have lost his former friends, abandoned his former career, and moved to a new town—this list plays an extremely important part in Abner/Alfonso’s argument. The assertion that in order to bring about conversion, the disputant must both cause a doubt and resolve that doubt with an explanation from his own religion sheds light on Abner/Alfonso’s sense of his goal in the *Teacher*. This double goal accounts for his alternating strategy throughout his text.

While the final reason—that certain people do not convert because they were predetermined by God not to do so³⁶—requires more abstract reasoning, most of the Teacher’s other reasons follow from his consideration of real-world conversion and its effects rather than a reflection on conversion from an intellectual position of Christian theology or Aristotelian philosophy. Unlike Ramon Martí, who claims that Jews do not convert out of malice, idiocy, and obduracy—ideas that derive from categories of Christian thought—Abner/Alfonso tries to consider practical reasons (fear, money, shame, habit, etc.) for which actual people might resist conversion.³⁷ This effort to reflect on concrete experience points to Abner/Alfonso’s awareness of the rhetorical demands put on his assertions directed, in Hebrew, to a Jewish readership. He tries to show that he understands the reasons why his reader might resist Christian appeals, including—ironically—his very own, the same that make up the remaining text of the *Teacher*. This attempt to consider what he thinks are the realistic doubts of his Jewish opponents exemplifies his gradual approach to disputation and conversion: to “make known the secrets of the Law

little by little and to raise [the Jew] from light to heavy, *one level at a time*, according to what he can attain.”³⁸

This measured, psychological strategy fits hand in glove with his depiction of the Jewish Rebel in the *Teacher*, which develops at length the Rebel’s persistent opposition to virtually all of the Christian Teacher’s points. At first blush, such resistance may not seem important, because the stubbornness of the Jewish interlocutor in theological debates is, like the dialogue form itself, a commonplace. In the context of Abner/Alfonso’s choosing not to employ standard anti-Jewish accusations, however, the issue of the intended audience is the key to understanding the uniqueness and importance of his depiction of the Rebel as “rebellious.” Rather than fulfilling the expectations of traditional apology, in which the stubborn Jew is an essential prop in an oft-repeated drama, the froward Jew in Abner/Alfonso’s text must somehow fit with his goals of persuasion and proof. Consequently, the Rebel’s responses to the Teacher are different from those of traditional dialogues in a number of ways. First, the Rebel’s answers are sometimes very long. In many previous dialogues between a Christian and a Jew, such as those of Justin Martyr, Moses/Petrus Alfonsi, and Gilbert Crispin, among many others, the Jewish disputant speaks frequently, but his statements are usually very short compared to those of the Christian. Mostly these statements are perfunctory prompts setting up the Christian explanation. Although in the *Teacher* there is still a very great disproportion between the length of the statements made by Christian and Jew, nevertheless the utterances given to the Jewish Rebel are often much longer than comparable ones found in any other medieval dialogue.³⁹ Although he does concede certain small points, the Rebel never concedes any of the nine major arguments made in chapters 2 through 10. In these details, the characterization of the Jewish protagonist in the *Teacher* shows conspicuous differences from traditional dialogues.

The representation of the Rebel as sincerely resistant to Christian arguments fits within a larger discussion of the relationship between teacher and disciple and the implications of this relationship on the broader issue of tradition and innovation in interpretation. Abner/Alfonso’s message displays a notable tension between insisting on continuity and orthodoxy within Jewish tradition and encouraging the Jew to think independently of his fellows. There is, on the one hand, a strong emphasis on continuity, faith, and tradition. At many points, the Teacher criticizes the impulse to interpret biblical and talmudic passages according to one’s own whims because “if man had the power to add words to the verses according to his will, he would distort the words of God and destroy the world [*trastornaria las palabras de Dios e astragaria el mundo*].”⁴⁰ In opposition to the standard

Christian notion that the Jews are overly literal and “carnal” in their hermeneutics, Abner/Alfonso argues the opposite: that Jews need to hew *closer* to the literal meaning of their authorities, a meaning he claims is best preserved in Christian teaching.⁴¹ Even though he does frequently argue that support for Christian ideas is a “secret” contained within the Talmud rather than an explicit message, he emphasizes that he, as a disciple, follows closely the teachings of previous masters in interpreting things literally as much as possible, and he encourages his Jewish reader to do the same.⁴² It is actually dangerous and misguided, he implies, to deviate from the most logical, literal, and traditional understanding, and thus he stresses that his explanation of Jewish sources is in line with orthodox thinking.

Part of his emphasis on faithfulness to tradition hinges on his depiction of himself as a “good disciple” of past Jewish sages rather than a radical or maverick thinker, saying, “No man should think of himself as a sage, but instead as an apprentice disciple.”⁴³ He presents himself as an ideal disciple, both humbly serving tradition but also courageous enough to speak out against distortions. He justifies both his deviation from Jewish teaching and his call to other Jews to explore their doubts and understand things on their own by observing that every good disciple has the duty to add to his master’s knowledge. Unless one is bold enough to go beyond the teaching of his masters, “knowledge would diminish and be lost from the world.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, a person should never pervert tradition and should change nothing of accepted tradition “unless reason forces him to do so in some places where he has no other advice.”⁴⁵

He stresses that such bold necessity is proper only for adult men, reserving his brand of doubt and argument for an intellectual male elite. While women and children “should follow the teachings [*dichos*] of others,” as should “most people who receive things without study,” nevertheless “when a man leaves off being a child...then he no longer has a reason to stay in the faith of his father and mother in which he was born and was raised...except because of the truth itself that he comes to know after great study and many disputations that he has with great sages of his time, and after all doubts were taken from his heart.”⁴⁶ It is in this context that Abner/Alfonso presents his conversion, comparing himself to Abraham as one who, in rabbinical tradition, refused to serve his father and instead heeded the call of God. Through his conversion, Abner/Alfonso represents himself as both a good disciple and a good master and so seeks to assuage the tension between following tradition and breaking with it that pervades his work. He claims, “I converted [*me convertí*] to the faith of the Christians...always drawing near to the understanding of those great, authentic sages, as far as I was able.”⁴⁷ His apostasy from

Judaism thus becomes a marker of his authenticity as a great Jewish teacher.

Abner/Alfonso places his statements about individual doubts (including his own) within a larger context of the historical struggles of Jews in Aragon in the thirteenth century. In his remarks, the Teacher makes many specific references to recent events in Jewish history, events that, in a parallel between text and reality, provide the real-life context for his work and also function as tools of Abner/Alfonso's strategy. Such historical references include not only his personal experiences but also mention of the activities of Mendicant friars in the thirteenth century as well as recent events such as when the Karaites (Jewish opponents of rabbinical tradition) of the Iberian Peninsula were forced to accept rabbinical Judaism.⁴⁸ In the discussion of these and other contemporary issues, Abner/Alfonso shows familiarity with the struggles that had marked the lives of Sephardic Jews such as those to whom he addressed the *Teacher*. By doing this, he invites his reader to participate in a dialogue about a *shared* faith, stating, "Let us make subtle arguments [*asotilizemos*] together between the two of us in a loving and good-natured way.... [T]his argument will be composed by [both] me and you."⁴⁹ His ultimate strategy is to pitch his ideas not as typical and familiar Christian arguments against Jews but as the joint conclusions of the Teacher and the Rebel.

Abner/Alfonso's efforts to blur the line between real life and his textual disputation was not merely a psychological strategy. Just over a decade after the *Teacher* was written, he himself is known to have brought his ideas to the attention of the king, making an accusation that Jews slander Christians in their prayer services during the "blessing concerning heretics [*Birkat ha-Minim*]," the twelfth benediction of the weekday *Amidah* prayers.⁵⁰ One of the very few facts known about Abner/Alfonso's public life is the record of charges he brought against the Jews in 1336 over this issue, prompting King Alfonso XI to ban the prayer. Abner/Alfonso's reference to this issue in the *Teacher*, however, fifteen years before this public activity, also serves to link him in part to the historical events of the 1240s (considered in the previous chapter), when the convert Nicholas Donin brought similar charges against the Jews, prompting the repeated trial and burning of the Talmud. Abner/Alfonso makes specific references to these events in the *Teacher* and argues that, ironically, the *Teacher* might actually help educate Christians "who want ill for [Jews], for which reason they sought to burn our Law and our Talmud and remove it from the world."⁵¹

Abner/Alfonso was similar to Donin in many respects: both were converts, both were anti-Jewish rhetoricians, both brought charges

against the “blessing concerning heretics.” But instead of defending Donin, as one might expect, Abner/Alfonso cites him and his actions as examples of heresy within Judaism, and rather than endorsing his attacks against the Talmud, he condemns them and attempts to present himself to his readers as a *defender* of the Talmud against such onslaughts. The Christian Teacher explicitly labels Donin a schismatic Jew, one of many Jews who “deny their Talmud” and “demand of the bishops and other Christian princes that they burn that Talmud.”⁵² In his later *Response to the Blasphemer*, he similarly accuses Isaac Pollegar of “asking some bishops...to burn the Talmud” and claims that he himself fought to *protect* it, exclaiming, “The true God knows how much I fought so that it would not be burned.”⁵³ In both the *Teacher* and in his later *Response*, Abner/Alfonso thus associates himself with Rabbi Yehiel of Paris as one of the guardians of the Talmud and compares those readers who might disagree with *him* to the real-world assailants on rabbinical tradition.

To be sure, this is a dangerous tactic: Abner/Alfonso is walking a fine line between associating himself with the arguments of Donin and distancing himself from him in an effort to show that the Jews are in need, as he says in the introduction, of “a Teacher of Righteousness from whom they may know the truth.”⁵⁴ The essence of his strategy, however, is to awaken in his reader a real sense of uncertainty and concern over the state of the Jewish community in Christian Castile and to present himself as one who can help unify and defend tradition. As the climax of the multipronged attacks on Aragonese Jewry in the thirteenth century, Abner/Alfonso catalogues this history of taxes, Talmud burning, censorship, and disputations as proof that the Jewish reader personally needs to take action. Adopting Christianity, he says, is the best way for Jews and all nations to overcome their internal fragmentation and tribulations and find “a concordance and a faith to put an end to all of the din and battles among them and achieve peace and salvation and eternal life.”⁵⁵ He evokes the real struggles of contemporary Jews as the context for his conversion and his teachings, and he is among the first writers to present conversion to Christianity not only as a victory for the Christians but as a solution for the Jews to the problems they faced.

PROPHETIC DREAMS AND MESSIANIC DUTY

Abner/Alfonso’s references to recent Jewish history are only one part of his larger framing of his text in the terms of his personal testimony. All of his cunning tactics for encouraging the Jewish reader to think of himself apart from his tradition and to resolve his doubts through

eclectic and unbiased study must be understood in this context of Abner/Alfonso's personal presence in the text. According to his self-presentation in his conversion narrative—which, as I considered in the introduction, has become the basis of critical reconstructions of the event of his conversion—his spiritual struggles began with the experience of meeting and helping many people when in 1295 the messianic hopes of many Jews went unfulfilled. The events are recorded in various sources and provoked a response by the Aragonese Rabbi Solomon Ibn Adret (d. 1310).⁵⁶ The fifteenth-century authors Solomon Halevi/Pablo de Santa María and Alonso de Espina, who quoted and summarized parts of Abner/Alfonso's earlier *Book of the Wars of the Lord* about these events, describe how false prophets rose up in Ávila and Ayllón, both predicting that in the year 1295 (5055 AM), on the last day of the summer month Tammuz, the Jews would be called out of exile.⁵⁷ According to these Christian sources, they assembled in the synagogue in white garments, as for Yom Kippur, after preparing themselves with penitence and alms. Abner/Alfonso's work allegedly claimed that crosses appeared on their clothing, and when they arrived home they found their garments there also marked. Santa María relates that "many were disturbed" (*multi eorum fuerunt turbati*), and according to de Espina, some of these sought medical advice from Abner, who was a doctor in Burgos.⁵⁸ In Abner/Alfonso's rendition of these events, which might be partly likened to Eusebius's account of Constantine's conversion after a vision of crosses (although Abner/Alfonso was very likely unfamiliar with Eusebius's text), his experience with those who came to him for help constituted the beginning of his doubts about his ancestral faith.⁵⁹

Rather than portraying his conversion as a sudden moment of clarity in which he saw the error of his Jewish belief, he paints his conversion as the product of an experience that he shared with other Jews in their common time of stress. By recounting this anecdote as the seed of his conversion and transformation, he suggests that his Jewish readers, who experienced the same history or who were certainly familiar with it, might very easily follow in his footsteps to conversion. He uses this historical event, which, like all historical references in his book, serves to draw parallels between the real history outside the text and the imaginary drama staged within it, as a bridge between himself and his audience. The parallel between the story and the events of history is, in this way, reduced to another parallel between Abner/Alfonso's public experiences and the private transformation that they provoked in him. On a textual level, the parallel between public and private experience, outer and inner man, Rebel and Teacher, is expressed as the parallel between the imaginary edifice of the dialogue and the intended real effect of persuasion and

conversion.

It is in this sense that we can understand how Abner/Alfonso's description of his conversion experience constitutes the key to his overall strategy. He begins his story, modeled on prophetic call narratives such as those in Isaiah and Ezekiel, with a well-known and oft-cited passage at the very beginning of the work:

I saw the oppression of the Jews, my people from whom I am descended, who are, in this long captivity, oppressed and broken and burdened heavily by taxes, this people that has lost the honor and glory it once had, which has no help or strength in itself. It happened one day, as I was thinking much on this plight, that I went into the synagogue with great cries and bitterness of heart, and I prayed unto the Lord, speaking thus: "I ask you, Lord God, for mercy that you be aware of the tribulations we are in, and why this is so, and on what basis this is so, and what the basis is for your great anger and fury which you have had for your people for a long time, your people and the lambs of your flock. 'Why will the nations say: Where is their God?' [Psalm 79:10] Now, Lord, hear my prayer and my supplications, and shine on your sanctuary, which is destroyed, and have mercy on your people Israel."⁶⁰

Abner/Alfonso evokes the concrete, material suffering of Iberian Jews as his own, describing himself as a member of the Jewish community that suffered "the tribulations *we* are in." He presents himself, in praying to God in the synagogue, as one of "your people," "your flock," and "your people Israel," establishing himself as a spokesman for his people, petitioning God for their liberation and welfare.

Within this context of a call for help and mercy in what he claims is his great suffering, shared with other Jews, Abner/Alfonso then experiences the first of a series of dreams that, he claims, played a critical role in his conversion, the dreams with which I began the introduction to the present study. He continues:

And in the great anxiety that I had in my heart and from the toil I had taken upon myself I grew tired and fell asleep. And I saw in a dream vision a great man who said to me: "'Why are you asleep?' [Jonah 1:6] 'Understand the words I am speaking to you, and straighten up' [*pàrate enffiesto*] [Isaiah 51:17] for I say to you that the Jews have been in this captivity for such a long time because of their folly and stupidity and for lack of a teacher of righteousness through whom they may know the truth. 'This is what God has said; Go with that much [*e vete con tanto*]' " [Ezekiel 45:9].⁶¹

He presents his vision as coming to him without his control and portrays himself as completely passive and even helpless in the face of

it. By fashioning himself from the very beginning as both victim and redeemer, Abner/Alfonso claims to be a Jew among Jews and, more important, a prophet figure who has redemptive power. The answer from God comes to him from beyond his control, suggesting that his dreams involve a kind of prophecy.⁶² He explicitly relates that his dream was what “God spoke to [him]” and thus the content is not even his own. Like the prophet Elijah, who was associated with the title “Teacher of Righteousness” in both Karaite and Rabbanite traditions, Abner/Alfonso also portrays himself as a chosen prophet of God, the new “Teacher of Righteousness” whom the Jews need for salvation. With his introductory vision in the *Teacher*, he presents himself as a divinely sent unraveler of exegetical knots, chosen unawares to finally help his people out of the captivity in which they are languishing. His understanding of himself as a model to be imitated can be seen later in the text in his invitation to the Jew, “Put your heart according to my understanding.”

Not only does Abner/Alfonso depict himself as chosen to receive the understanding granted by God in response to his supplications, but he also presents the entire process that leads him from his dreams to his final conversion as an unconscious process, claiming, “When I awoke from my dream, I did not heed anything from that vision.” In the next breath, however, he claims that “a desire entered me” to study the books of Scripture, exegesis, and philosophy “as much as I could, and I worked at this for some time.”⁶³ Considering his later prodding of the reader to “incline your ear and hear the words of the sages...and do not go out to argue with and contradict their understanding,” his initial process of study and enlightenment logically comes to him from beyond the horizon of his own intentions.⁶⁴ Thus, the fruits of his labor were not in consonance with his conscious understanding of his belief, but rather, “what I gained from all those studies after much work was hard for me [to accept], because it was very strange reasoning to me, according to the habit and custom that I was used to before this in believing in the faith of the Jewish people.”⁶⁵ He does not give himself over to the new ideas, but like a faithful Jew and true prophet, he struggles against them, stating to himself, “I shall not remember [my dream] any more, I shall remove it from my heart [*tollerlo-he de mi coração*] and imagination, and I shall remain in the faith in which I was born, as my father and grandfather and all my past generations remained, whether it be a good faith or a bad one, and I will not pay heed to my heart [*non cataré a mi coração*] or my thoughts, for I am no better than my ancestors.”⁶⁶ By presenting his doubt as upsetting to him and expressing his true intention to ignore the revelations coming to him in order to “remain in the faith in which I was born,” just as his

ancestors did—and indeed, he insists he is “no better”—he appeals to the continuity of generations, implying that his conversion was for the benefit of all Jews.

According to his account, he tries repeatedly to slough off the burden of his dream revelation, but God keeps calling him back against his will. After many days of resistance, some unnamed “tribulation” befell him, leading him to fast and eventually provoking the return of his dream specter. “I saw in a dream vision that same man as three years before,” who said to him “as if he were angry: ‘How long, slugabed, will you sleep? When will you arise from dreams [Proverbs 6:9]? Because you are responsible for the sins of all of the Jews and their children and generations.’” As he spoke, Abner/Alfonso “was very frightened and afraid,” leading to a climactic night sweat in which “all of my top clothing became wet with very beautiful pictures of crosses, according to the sign of Jesus the Nazarene,” and the great man then told Abner/Alfonso, “‘The seal of God is true’ [BT Shabbat 55a]. ‘Behold I made your errors like a cloud and like a cloud your sins. Return to me, for I have redeemed you’ [Isaiah 44:22].” This narrative seems to convey only a single instance of what was a recurring vision that he experienced “many times in different ways,”⁶⁷ gradually pushing him to convert.

It is here that Abner/Alfonso connects his conversion with the historical events of recent memory. After thinking about the meaning of the miraculous crosses, he thinks immediately of the events of 1295. “And I said [to myself]: ‘Perhaps the fact of those seals was like the seals that many neighborhoods of Jews in this kingdom of Castile found as a symbol of the coming of Christ, which was shown to them through the sayings of two Jews held to be prophets among them at that time, which was twenty-five years ago.’”⁶⁸ He implies not only that his experience in 1295 was the beginning of the spiritual doubts leading up to his final prophetic dreams, but also that his final prophetic call is a climactic moment in the sacred spiritual stresses of “his” people rather than the isolated experience of one individual apostate. He presents himself as giving voice to the general doubts of his people. In fact, “many Jews are oppressed and afflicted in their hearts because they were born in their Law, and they curse their parents and their grandparents with their mouths or in their hearts for not turning to the Law of the Christians, but for leaving them this bad legacy and this prison from which they cannot leave as they would like.”⁶⁹ This “bad legacy” of doubt is just what Abner/Alfonso encourages his Jewish readers to consider as a motivation to explore their doubts and search for truth on their own, apart from the guidelines of their faith, if need be.

This movement from text to action, from exegesis of the dream to

conversion itself, likewise becomes a metaphor for the kind of self-motivated transformation that Abner/Alfonso calls his readers to undertake. Like the double valence of his call to both uphold tradition and depart from it, he depicts dreams as both a form of illusion and uncertainty as well as a path to awakening and to the movement from illusion to truth.⁷⁰ He uses his dream as a prophetic call authorizing him to teach in opposition to obtaining norms, while invoking the words of Abraham Ibn ‘Ezra’ to characterize his Jewish readers as “sleepers who will not awaken from their insane dream.”⁷¹ In the *Teacher*, he repeatedly cites Daniel 12:2 (“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt”) to distinguish between the righteous who convert and the sinners who persist in the errors of the rabbis. In fact, he recites this verse on the *last folio* of the manuscript as the very last biblical *testimonium* cited in the work, his final Parthian shot against “those of wrong understanding and those asleep [los malos entendidos e los dormidores].”⁷² Just as his treatise opens with the authorizing invocation of what we can call his “horn gate” dream, it closes with a condemnation of the false prophecy of those who do not awaken from their false “ivory gate” dream. Through this opposition, Abner/Alfonso frames the *Teacher* with a claim to his prophetic legitimacy that also serves as a condemnation of his coreligionists. He thus fits the entire text of the *Teacher* into the frame of his personal conversion story, which, he claims, was born entirely out of the common experience he shared with his readers.

TEXTUAL AUCTORITAS AND AUTHORIAL AMBIGUITY

Abner/Alfonso’s unsolicited dream is the vehicle by which he authenticates his new understanding of his ancestral tradition as more than just his own interpretation. His period of intense study and doubt transformed him, partly against his will, into one of the same sages he cites as proofs, “the great authentic sages who studied much in the sciences and wrote authentic books.” He thus implies that his book, the very text being read by the Jewish reader, is one of the Jews’ own authorities, akin to the prophetic books of Scripture.

This implication takes on even greater significance in light of Abner/Alfonso’s extensive discussion of textual authority in the opening chapter of the *Teacher*, immediately following his conversion narrative and prologue. The discussion of what constitutes authority holds a place almost as prominent in the overall content of the *Teacher* as his opening conversion scene, and the two sections work together to ground the text that follows. When he establishes “which books and

premises we should take proof from in this book,” he explains that there are three classes of authoritative proofs.⁷³ Two of these (the second and third) refer to those that can be taken either by Jews against Christians or vice versa, but not by both. In discussing these, he stresses that Jews and Christians cannot use their own authorities against other groups because such sources are not considered authoritative by nonbelievers. The issue of authenticity is the key to determining the legitimacy and strength of textual authority, and in religious disputation one can use only proofs that one’s opponents “hold as authentic books among themselves.”⁷⁴ This notion of authenticity is key in Abner/Alfonso’s ideas for his appeal to his Jewish readers on what he believes are their own terms. Because most Jews, he says, believe in the Talmud and would not dare go against it, Christians should “bring proofs against them from the great sages that are authentic and honored among them.”⁷⁵ Even more important for this appeal, however, is Abner/Alfonso’s attempt to expand the meaning of authoritative proof *beyond* textual categories. There are, for certain, books accepted by everyone, “books from which both sides, Christians and Jews, that is, the Christian Teacher and the Jewish Rebel, should take proofs equally, and also the Moors can take proof from them if they should want to.” These are Scriptural books of the Pentateuch and Prophets but also books of Hebrew grammar, history, and philosophy. To this eclectic list, Abner/Alfonso then adds the curious remark, “Also, everything that shows good human understanding, even if it is not found written in a book, is of this category.”⁷⁶ In light of the conversion account immediately preceding this explanation, this expansion of authority to include even nontextual sources calls his dream to mind but also connects those visions to recognizable categories of argumentation and proof. Relying on the common notion within Jewish legal thought that a Jew remains a Jew even after his conversion to another religion because “although [he] sinned, [he is still] Israel” (BT Sanhedrin 40a), Abner/Alfonso specifically characterizes his position as a convert who still believes in the Talmud as one of the key strategies that Christians have in arguing against Jews.⁷⁷ Citing repeatedly the talmudic legal dictum that “the admission of the litigant is [as effective] as a hundred witnesses,” he replaces authentic textual authority with his personal testimony.⁷⁸

The shift in focus from *authentic text* to *authentic voice* is the key to understanding what makes Abner/Alfonso’s approach different from that of the thirteenth century. Because he has a clearly rhetorical goal of persuasion and because he expresses, unlike his predecessors, an understanding that textual authority alone would not suffice to make an argument compelling, Abner/Alfonso framed this wide use of sources (the citation of which still takes up much of the text) by his

personal perspective of testimony and direct appeal. His notion of *auctoritas* expanded the thirteenth-century obsession with authority to include not only biblical and rabbinical *testimonia* but personal testimony as well. In his writing, the threads of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are braided into a single chain of textual authority and authorial voice.

This notion of extratextual proof relates to Abner/Alfonso's conception of the role of aggadic material in understanding truth. As we saw in the accounts of the debates in Barcelona and Paris, Jewish disputants frequently charge the Christians with relying only on aggadic texts, and even explicitly say, as Nahmanides does in his account, that a Jew is not obliged to believe in those specific aggadic examples. Robert Chazan has noted that one of Ramon Martí's strategies in the *Dagger of Faith* to improve upon Fra Pau's ideas was precisely to add nonaggadic sources to a litany of authorities.⁷⁹ Abner/Alfonso answers both of these strategies by including legal, halakhic proof-texts but also by directly defending the use of aggadic texts as *auctoritates*. When the Rebel makes the same points about them as Nahmanides did at Barcelona, arguing that "Jews are not bound to believe in those books, which are like sermons," the Teacher enters into a long defense of such sources, a defense that Abner/Alfonso himself would repeat in his *Response to the Blasphemer* two decades later.⁸⁰ In contrast to Christian approaches to the aggadot, which did not always take them literally, he argues that such texts should not be understood as figurative or metaphorical unless there is good reason to justify it.⁸¹ A literal reading of aggadic examples, moreover, in fact leads to a clear defense of Christianity. Because they were used by the most important thinkers in medieval Jewish tradition in order to prove their points—he names the rabbis of the Talmud, the Babylonian *ge'onim*, Rashi, and Maimonides as examples—to reject such sources is tantamount to heresy, and anyone who does reject them is not a Jew but a heretic who "denies [his] own authentic sages, who give testimony of the faith of God and of his prophets."⁸² Just as the Teacher makes this claim against the Rebel in the *Teacher*, so Abner/Alfonso himself makes this claim directly to Isaac Pollegar in his later *Response*.⁸³ Through these accusations, Abner/Alfonso shows that he is not trying to compensate for the nonlegal nature of aggadic material by offering other halakhic citations in their place, but instead is claiming that the authority of aggadic texts depends on how they are supported by other authentic quotations and the explanations of Jewish sages. It is here that he includes, by implication, his personal commentary, considering himself an *authentic* Jewish authority whose testimony is legally binding.

Abner/Alfonso's attempt to establish his *authoritative* voice in the

text through first-person testimony leads to a preponderate *authorial* voice throughout the *Teacher*. In the context of medieval Castilian prose, this “authorial consciousness” marks his work as unique not only among polemical texts, but also in Castilian writing before the fifteenth century.⁸⁴ The inclusion of his personal experience and perspective, however, is not simply a benign addition to his case. It has serious implications for the overall rhetorical coherence of his argument in the *Teacher*. The tricks and strategies of his direct appeal to his readers and his calculated use of his conversion to construct his authority consist of various suggestive layers of meaning and nuance. This attempt at subtlety, especially in the use of anecdote and personal testimony, is defined by the fictional techniques that Abner/Alfonso seeks to employ. However, I believe that his rhetorical and logical strategies actually compromised his polemical agenda, permeating his apodictic claims with the indeterminacy of fiction. In making this claim, which I develop in the paragraphs that follow, I of course do not intend to evaluate the truth value of Abner/Alfonso’s ideas on philosophical or theological grounds, a task for which I am, in any case, methodologically ill-equipped. Rather, by viewing them through the lens of literary criticism, I aim, as I have in previous chapters, to consider how his polemical arguments function textually and rhetorically and how they are in tension with the narrative elements used to express them.

I have already mentioned a variety of curious contradictions in his imagery—such as his urging that the Jew “strive and work to understand by himself,” alongside his reiteration of the dictum that “all of Israel is responsible one through another” and his presentation of dreams as both prophetic and illusory—yet such paradoxes are only circumstantial to the larger ambiguity engendered by his use of his personal experience, expressed in fictional terms, as a source of nonfictional argumentative authority. The upshot of trying both to represent the Jew in realistic and sympathetic terms and also of presenting himself and his experience of conversion as part of that Jewish experience is that Abner/Alfonso subjects the foundation of authority in his text—his prophetically inspired conversion experience—to the very language of Jewish doubt that he uses as a tool of narrative drama and of rhetorical appeal. His representation of himself as both Jewish in his experience and knowledge and Christian in his conclusions is rendered irresolvably self-contradictory (or, from the perspective of fiction, pleasantly open-ended) by the constant characterization of the Jewish Rebel as rebellious.

Part of this ambiguity is expressed in terms of the Jewish Rebel’s lack of trust in the Christian Teacher. From the beginning, the Rebel states his distrust of the Teacher, admitting plainly, “I am afraid of

you—I tell God the truth.”⁸⁵ The Rebel repeats his distrust in various passages in the text, accusing the Teacher of distorting authorities and using tricks (such as numerology) “in order to undo the true and received faith that I have. I have seen many heretics and converts who do this, and according to what I heard about you, you are in some ways just like them.”⁸⁶ Yet Because Abner/Alfonso identifies himself with both the Christian Teacher and, through his conversion account, the Jewish Rebel, this distrust not only involves a staging of Jewish doubt, but also seems to dramatize (presumably against his conscious intentions) Abner/Alfonso’s distrust of his own reasoning to himself. The suggestion that the Christian side of Abner/Alfonso’s authorial persona has not fully convinced the Jewish side implies that the allegedly real conversion experience that the text claims to dramatize was itself not free of doubt or hesitation.⁸⁷ In other words, in the context of Abner/Alfonso’s use of his conversion story—so full of doubts, struggles, and a long transformation—the authoritative voice he constructs as the basis of his rhetorical appeal is thus tainted with an authentic presence of real doubt and uncertainty. Because he chooses to depict his voice in fictionalized terms, his internal past Jewish self begins to seem unconvinced by his actual Christian arguments in the present, and so his conversion—the cornerstone of his authority—insofar as it is meant to refer to his real self’s experience, seems oddly inauthentic. Thus the distrust the Rebel shows toward the Teacher as a marker of his authentic Jewish identity ironically risks becoming the pitfall of Abner/Alfonso’s argumentation, the fictional petard by which his polemical authority is hoist.

The Christian’s unfulfilled promise to win the Jew over at the start of the work becomes complicated by this elaborate fictional play of perspectives that makes it unclear who is actually convincing whom. After the Jew expresses his fear of the Christian and his concern that he will trick him with specious arguments, he inverts the entire perspective of the roles of Teacher and Rebel, stating to his Christian opponent: “I want you to know...just as you believe you will conquer and turn my understanding to believe in your opinions, so I believe I will conquer you and turn your understanding to believe in mine. Just because you write this book and call your name ‘Teacher’ and mine ‘Rebel,’ I believe that the struggle is the opposite, and the names and words of the writing could be changed and the book would end up as a help to the Jews.”⁸⁸ This belief is reinforced at the very end of the text, when the Rebel thanks the Teacher for teaching the Christians about the Talmud and showing it to be a valuable book of authority.⁸⁹ Not only can the roles of Christian and Jew, Teacher and Rebel be reversed, but also the intended effect of the Christian’s words results, from the Jewish perspective, in a help rather than an injury. Abner/

Alfonso thus seems inadvertently to undermine the success of his entire rhetorical enterprise in the *Teacher*, showing that the result of his use of Jewish sources and counterarguments was only to help convince Jews of their faith and convince Christians of the worth of the Talmud. Indeed, he takes this to be proof that God is actually on the side of the Jews, turning every act of Christian aggression into a benefit for them.

The baffling and seemingly self-contradictory candor born of Abner/Alfonso's fictional games increases as the work nears its end. In one of the final chapters, the Rebel claims that the Christians seem to have no power to harm the Jews or reduce their numbers, despite their intentions to do so, boasting that God looks out for the Jews, a fact proven by their ongoing survival among hostile Christians and Muslims. Even though Christian and Muslim "kings and leaders have taken council and agreed to destroy us from the world," nevertheless "God undoes their councils and their thoughts" and shows his preference for the Jews: "In every generation they rise up against us to destroy us, but God protects us and saves us from their hands. So look if there is a greater or stronger miracle than this! What proof could be greater than this to know that we are God's people and his heirs, and that he fulfills the promise and covenant he made with our ancestors."⁹⁰ While such statements in themselves are conventional, their placement in the mouth of the Jewish opponent within a Christian dialogue is striking. Through such statements by the Rebel, which persist throughout the *Teacher*, any assertions against the Jews in other sections become relativized as those of a fictional character rather than the reasoning of an omniscient author. Under the sway of the fictional incarnations in the Teacher and the Rebel, the *author* Abner/Alfonso, along with his ideas, begins to lose his real identity. Increasingly determined by his fiction, his declarations of faith, and indeed the very model of his conversion as a framing device for the whole argument to follow, are likewise rhetorically subverted, lost in the play of representation rather than grounded in the gravitas of exemplarity.

The fact that, according to the text itself and the introductory summary, the Jew remains defiant throughout the work and does *not* convert at the end may not seem surprising when compared to other anti-Jewish treatises in which the stubbornness and blindness of the Jew are simply reinforced by his failure to convert at the end of a dialogue (such as, for example, in that of Gilbert Crispin).⁹¹ In the context of Abner/Alfonso's rhetorical appeal to Jewish readers, however, the fictionalized stubbornness of the Jew engenders a wealth of contradictory messages within the text. If Abner/Alfonso is indeed evoking the standard trope of the stubborn and obdurate

hermeneutical Jew of medieval theology, then his depiction can at best fall on deaf ears as being a Christian and not a Jewish perspective (a fact that works against the ongoing testimony and appeal of his perspective as more Jewish than Christian). At worst, the invocation of a stubborn Jew, made in an effort to be authentic in his depiction of the Rebel, can only claim to encourage the Jewish reader to recognize this resistance as part of a common experience and perhaps confirm him in a resolute rejection of Abner/Alfonso's anti-Jewish claims. The conflict between the Teacher and the Rebel cannot be seen as dialectical or pedagogical because the Rebel remains unmoved and unchanged at the end of the text, which provides no clear condemnation of his defiance. Abner/Alfonso's effort to present himself as both converter and converted implies that he is either to be the unconvinced Jew whose conversion was false or the unconvincing Christian who need not be heeded.

On the other hand, there is another possible explanation for the stubbornness and nonconversion of the Rebel in the text. By offering what his reader might consider convincing arguments on the one hand, and by depicting the resistance of the Rebel to such arguments on the other, Abner/Alfonso could simply be illustrating how a Jew might remain unmovable even in the face of sufficient proofs to merit conversion. Perhaps he intends that the Jewish reader be left to wonder how the Jew did not convert and that he be made to recognize that it was out of stubbornness only. Even in this logical scenario, however, the rhetoric is at odds with the argument because Abner/Alfonso has framed the message with the story of his *own* conversion. In other words, it is not the doubtful Rebel alone that sows doubt; rather, it is the fact that the discussion was initially framed by what is purportedly the author's conversion story that determines any subsequent portrayal of doubt or faith. Any doubt on the part of the Rebel, no matter how logical or merited, ultimately intersects with the question of the author's own faith or doubt, and this question determines the core of the text's argumentative authority. Put differently, whatever the reasons for the Rebel's resistance (unjustified stubbornness or authentic doubt), the representation of that resistance cannot be kept completely apart from the representation of the author's own converted persona, and this conflation affects his authoritative status as a model for his readers.

The internal dissonance between the implications of Abner/Alfonso's appeal to his personal experience and the effort to endow the Jewish Rebel with a verisimilitude alien to the terms of Christian theology cannot be considered apart from the tension inherent in the Christian appropriation and use of rabbinical sources in service of Christian faith. There is, from the very beginning of this use by Fra

Pau at the Disputation of Barcelona and even more explicitly in the writings of Ramon Martí, a fundamental ambivalence about the real nature of such rabbinical citations, and they are characterized by these writers as simultaneously erroneous and truthful. In Martí's words, "A wise man never despises a precious stone, even if it is found on the head of a dragon or a toad. Honey is the spit of bees, or maybe something worth even less [than spit]."92 For Martí, the solution to this conundrum comes by arguing that the Talmud happens to contain some true things, in spite of the Jews themselves. For Abner/Alfonso, the double status of the Talmud as both a source of truth and the proof of Jewish deviation from that truth means that it serves as an even more authoritative proof of his own claims.93 Yet the internal contradictions that define the Christian appropriation of Jewish books for Christological purposes play themselves out dramatically in his attempt to appropriate Jewish identity and experience through narrative as the basis for rhetorical appeal.

Despite the fact that the *Teacher* is the most tangled and complex of late medieval anti-Jewish texts, the uncertainty it wrestles with was already signaled as an argumentative weakness by Solomon Ibn Adret. His *Commentaries on the Aggadot (Perushei Aggadot)*, which includes a fictionalized dialogue between Christian and Jew, was written in the late thirteenth century, probably in response to Martí's attacks. When the Christian voice cites a Jewish authority to support his case, the Jew retorts: "Who recounted this *Aggadah*? A Jew or a Christian or a heretic [min] who behaved like a Jew and believed like a Christian [*she-haya noheg ke-yisra'eli u-ma'amin ke-nozri*]? Now if he was truly a Jew, then he did not make the statement in the fashion you indicate, for then he would not have been a Jew. If he was a Christian, then I need not believe what he said regarding this matter. Let him say whatever he wishes. If he was a heretic, then neither we nor you need believe in what he says. One does not bring proof from a heretic."94 Despite his attempt to answer this conundrum through his innovative use of a fictionalized voice and his invocation of his own hybrid testimony, Abner/Alfonso would face a similar challenge in his lifetime from the pen of his student. In his response to Abner/Alfonso, Isaac Pollegar directly attacked his teacher's claim to a Jewish voice by insisting that he forfeited his Jewish status upon conversion and, with it, his right to cite and interpret Jewish authorities. "From the day your sins enticed you to do this [i.e., convert], you do not have permission to repent openly or to speak or make claims, except by the teachings of the faith to which you have turned."95

As these criticisms suggest, Abner/Alfonso's works embody not only the culmination of the rhetoric of conversion and the appeal to authenticity, but their final exhaustion in the paradox of

differentiating individual identity and difference through the open-ended signification of narrative representation. Caught in the liminal state between selfhood and otherness, author and character, Abner/Alfonso does not escape the aporia generated by the paradox of his textual identity, at least not in the *Teacher*. (His later writing, which lacks any depiction of conversion, is not plagued by the same ambiguity.) Although intended as the ultimate appeal to both authority and authenticity, his split authorial voice in the *Teacher* is doomed to instability behind the irresolvable ambiguity of his words, remaining a temporal narrative couched in the terms of a shifting and split narrator. In contrast to Augustine's stable notion of Jews as eternal witnesses, granting authority by their disbelief, the internalized Rebel Jew of the *Teacher* undercuts the Christian claim to *auctoritas*-indifference by making perceived Jewish disbelief either too Christian to be authentic or too authentic to be Christian. Like his fictional surrogate, Abner/Alfonso himself, by being forced to choose between authenticity and authority, inadvertently forfeits both in the cultivation of his authorship.



The early writing of Abner/Alfonso signifies a critical turning point in the evolution of conversionary fictions examined in this study. The processes initiated at the turn of the twelfth century of seeking to stabilize *auctoritas* followed a course leading to an increasing focus on authenticity in the representation of both language and individual experience and knowledge. In Abner/Alfonso's conflation of a conversionary rhetoric of personal testimony with that of an appeal to linguistic and textual familiarity, the distinctions between selfhood and otherness, identity and alterity, upon which his arguments are founded began to blur. This blurring left in its wake an uncertainty about any possible next step in the elusive pursuit of authenticity as the foundation of authority.

Nevertheless, even in the subsequent, more traditional representations of conversion such as those of Solomon/Pablo and Juan Andrés considered earlier in this book, the narration of conversion in Christian polemical texts remained what it had been in the twelfth century: a dramatization in miniature of the logic of supersession. It would be reasonable to assume that the stories of conversion to Islam found in contemporary Islamic treatises against Judaism and Christianity would play a role similar to that of Christian texts, namely, to dramatize the logic of abrogation and the falsification of Scriptures on which Islamic claims are largely based. It

is to this question—Does the narration of conversion in Islamic sources play a role similar to that found in Christian texts?—that I turn in the final chapter, where I compare the Christian examples from previous chapters with contemporary narratives of conversion to Islam.

The Supersessionist Imperative

Islam and the Historical Drama of Revelation

If all time is eternally present, all time is unredeemable.

—T. S. ELIOT, “Burnt Norton,” *Four Quartets*

Deep within Abner/Alfonso’s staged debate between Christian and Jew in the *Teacher of Righteousness*, the Teacher makes the argument that one important indicator of Christian truth is its wide acceptance by all people, even those of other religions. He explains, “All the gentiles of the world, or most of them, accepted the faith of Jesus Christ. Even the Moors accepted it in most things, and they believe that Jesus the Nazarene was the Messiah and that he was to come for the salvation of the world.” As a result of this alleged belief, he tells the Jewish Rebel, the Moors are actually Christians: “All who believe that Jesus the Nazarene was the Christ should be called Nazarenes and Christians. Therefore, we say that the Moors are Nazarenes [los moros son nazarenos], which is to say, Christians.”¹

Abner/Alfonso here argues that Muslims, by virtue of their belief in Jesus and Mary as expressed in the Qur’ān, play a hermeneutical role in history as a support to Christian belief. He thus expresses a view, which is also evident in a number of other contemporary anti-Jewish texts, in which Islam is theologically closer to Christian belief than Judaism and thus can play the role of witness to doubting Jews. The most illuminating of such contemporary sources is a *consilium*, or legal opinion, adjudicated by the Italian jurist Oldradus de Ponte (d. 1335) in which he poses the question “A Jew went over to the sect [*transivit ad sectam*] of the Saracens. The question is put, should he be punished?” In general, Oldradus says, it is better not to know the way of the Lord at all than to commit apostasy by first knowing it and then rejecting it. He argues that conversion from Judaism to Islam pertains to the former rather than the latter scenario. “Since [the new Muslim]

did not know the truth [as a Jew], he evidently neither looked back nor departed from the way of the Lord [in converting]—quite the contrary, the Saracen sect is not as bad as [sit *minus mala quam*] that of the Jews.... One ought not be punished, therefore, for choosing the path of lesser evil [*viam minus malam*].”² These remarkable assertions by Abner/Alfonso and Oldradus fit within a wide context of fourteenth-century debates over the relative worth of Jews and Muslims in which Islam is generally deemed to have, in a theological sense, more in common with Christianity than does Judaism.

Some Christian authors like Abner/Alfonso brought this implicit hierarchy to bear directly on anti-Jewish disputation. The idea of conversion to Islam functioned for such writers as a foil against which they understood and characterized conversion from Judaism. Authors such as Ramon Martí in the thirteenth century and Abner/Alfonso and Alfonso Buenhombre (Alfonsus Bonihominis, d. 1353, author of the immensely popular *Epistle of Rabbi Samuel* (*Epistola Rabbi Samualis*) in the fourteenth refer, albeit in different ways, to the affinities between Jewish and Muslim belief. They do so, moreover, as part of a specifically anti-Jewish discourse, arguing that Muslim belief in Mary and Jesus leaves Jews in the minority opinion. At the end of Buenhombre’s anti-Jewish *Epistle*—a series of letters between two Moroccan Jews concluding with an affirmation of the inherent truth of Christianity—the character Samuel remarks to his friend Isaac, “We are enemies to all people and the testimony of the majority—that is, of the Saracens and of the Christians, of the Qur’ān and of the Gospels, [neither] of which we want to believe—is always against us.”³ In Buenhombre’s lesser known Latin dialogue *The Dispute of Abutalib* (*Disputatio Abutalib*), a text that completes and expands upon the *Epistle*’s final chapters, he develops the polemical potential of this Christian-Muslim alliance in more elaborate fictional terms. After an outwardly civil epistolary debate about the true religion—this time between the Jewish Samuel and his Muslim friend Abu Talib—the latter not only convinces the former of the errors he sees in Judaism. He also himself concedes the error of Islam and implores his Jewish friend to convert with him to Christianity.⁴ For fourteenth-century Christian writers like Buenhombre and Oldradus, Islam, while still erroneous, could be seen as a step on the road to Christianity.

Abner/Alfonso and Oldradus seem to be speaking hypothetically and Buenhombre seems to be operating in a particularly fantastic realm of missionary fiction, but their ideas depend on a historical backdrop in which conversion to Islam not only was conceivable for Christian thinkers but carried a symbolic theological value. But what did such writers really understand about becoming a Muslim? While the *idea* of conversion to Islam certainly took on an undeniable

theological attraction for certain Christian writers in this period, it is less certain how closely such notions actually approximated the realities of conversion to Islam. Would the Christian understanding of conversion conveyed in these works be at all meaningful in an Islamic context? More important, how can we compare the *representation* of conversion in Christian texts with the representation in contemporary Islamic sources?

To answer these questions, I propose to look in detail at four accounts of conversion to Islam linked explicitly to religious treatises contemporary with the examples considered in previous chapters: the autobiography of a twelfth-century Baghdadi/Anatolian Jew, Samaw'al al-Maghribi; the anti-Jewish tractates of Sa'id Ḥasan of Alexandria (converted in 1298) and of the late fourteenth-century Moroccan convert 'Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī; and the fifteenth-century anti-Christian attack of a former friar, Anselm Turmeda. These texts were chosen in part because of their diverse origin (twelfth-century Anatolia, thirteenth-century Egypt, fourteenth-century Morocco, fifteenth-century Tunis) in order to offer a wide and varied picture of conversion stories in Arabic that circulated across the Islamic world. Despite their diverse origins, however, the manuscripts containing them overlapped in circulation.⁵ A comparison of these texts, which amount to only a small sampling of the wide array of medieval sources narrating conversion to Islam in the medieval Mediterranean and Near East, offers examples of narrative complexity and the development of the story of conversion that reflect a different soteriological picture than Christian sources. Whereas the Christian examples we have examined mostly reflect a dialectical concept of history, one that evokes the Jewish past even as it rejects it, these Muslim texts seem to be more ordered and chronological and more focused on action and concrete events than on exegetical typology. As a result, certain structures that are key to Christian accounts (retrospection, foreshadowing, repetition, personal testimony as a basis of authoritativeness, a circular pattern of doubt and belief) are replaced by other structures (a dramatic break with authority, a climactic moment of revelation, a definitive rejection of past error) that more fittingly reflect Islamic notions of sacred history.

TURNING TURK, BY ANY OTHER NAME

Before directly considering these narratives of conversion to Islam and investigating their connection with Christian and Jewish accounts, we must pause briefly to ask a more fundamental question: How is conversion understood in Islamic sources? In his study of Christian

sources, Karl Morrison has offered one answer to this question, asserting that Muslim notions of religious change are essentially incommensurate with Christian notions of conversion. "Although Islam and Christianity were both religions of conversion," he claims, "conversion was not institutionalized in Islam, which lacked both a priesthood and a hierarchy." The results of this difference are, in his view, dramatic: "Arabic has no equivalent for the mysterious inwardness of change connoted by 'conversion.' Consequently, nuances of doctrinal understanding...were for Muslims not indices of an unfolding apocalyptic conflict between good and evil."⁶ Do such far-reaching generalizations bear scrutiny? If so, what impact might they have on our reading of conversion stories in Islam?

Even a superficial look at Islamic writing about what might be called *conversion* in Islam would suggest a number of problems with Morrison's claims. On the one hand, it is true that Arabic has no single fixed term for conversion as it is understood in Christian sources. Although a variety of terms are used to describe the process of adopting Islam, the most common is *aslama*, literally "to submit" (i.e., to God's will), and the phenomenon akin to conversion to Islam is commonly rendered as *Islām*, "becoming Muslim" or "adopting Islam."⁷ As the historian Richard Bulliet notes, the appearance of the term *aslama* in early chronicles of conquest and the spread of Islam (such as the *Conquests of the Regions [Futūḥ al-Buldān]* by the ninth-century Persian historiographer al-Balādhurī) includes virtually no distinction between the surrender of the conquered people of a region to Islamic rule and the surrender of an individual or community to the Islamic faith. Equally noticeable, he explains, is the marked paucity of explicit mentions of a change of religion in early Islamic biographical dictionaries. He hypothesizes that before the societies themselves were largely under Islamic rule, belief, at least as it is configured in Christian conversion scenarios, seems to figure little if at all in the definition of identity. In the early centuries of the spread of Islam, at least for newly conquered non-Arabs ruled by an Arab elite, professing Islam carried a heavy social stigma, leading to "relatively few upper class converts" and more new Muslims who were "largely former prisoners of war and a larger number of riffraff."⁸ In early Islamic texts from before the eleventh century, "Islam posed more of a socio-political challenge to the believer than a spiritual one.... [L]ittle was expected spiritually or intellectually of the early converts to Islam."⁹ Similarly, Devin DeWeese, who has offered one of the most sophisticated and extensive treatments of the intersection of narrative and the process of Islamization (focusing on the Golden Horde of inner Asia), argues that because, in the first centuries of Islam, conversion to Islam most essentially "is not a change of heart...but a

change of status,” there are “inherent links between religious identity and communal identity.”¹⁰ In the early centuries of Islam, Morrison’s claim that conversion as an inner change of belief was never “institutionalized” does seem to be supported, or at least not contradicted, by these historical sources.

This tentative conclusion, we should note, understands conversion only as a matter of a social process of “becoming Muslim” and gives short shrift to the representation of belief and spiritual renewal among Muslims themselves. Medieval Islamic civilization in fact boasts of a rich hagiographic tradition in which the veneration and celebration of saints or “friends” of God (*awliyyā’*, plural of *walī*) was widespread and tales of spiritual conversion to a life of piety and religious devotion were common. Among the best known is the spiritual confession of the eleventh-century Persian theologian Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), whose *Deliverance from Error* (*Al-Munkidh min al-ḍalāl*) tells of his turn from a traditional orthodox religiosity to a deeper mystical piety. Al-Ghazālī’s *Deliverance* is a classic account of what in Christian sources can be called “inner conversion.” It stands at the head of a robust tradition of hagiographic writing, in both first and third person, dramatizing the path of the believer to a higher plane of holiness.¹¹ About this wealth of personal stories, including many of conversion to mystical Sufism, it is patently incorrect to deny that a “mysterious inwardness of change” might accompany a renewal of piety or devotion or that Islamic sources (or the Arabic language) were somehow incapable of expressing such an inward change. Moreover, such examples follow a pattern similar to Christian hagiographic works in their lack of firm distinction between the *textual* identity of the saint or holy person within the hagiographic description and the reality of his or her life as characterized in the text.

Leaving aside this notion of spiritual renewal *within* Islamic belief and approaching conversion only in terms of a change from one religious affiliation to another, Morrison’s claims might be truer, at least as regards the first centuries of Islam. After the tenth century, however, when, Bulliet argues, “conversion [to Islam] became a matter of belief,” the process of changing religious affiliation and professing a new belief structure began to take on a decidedly controversial aspect in a predominantly written form. “To prove you had converted to Islam [after the tenth century], you had to show that you were knowledgeable not only about Islam but about your former faith as well.”¹² David Wasserstein sees this same change in the nature of conversion, although he suggests it occurred slightly later, arguing that it was not until after five centuries of Islamic rule that the “prior religious affiliation of a convert” became “a matter of great significance.”¹³ It seems both would agree—contrary to Morrison’s

assertions—that by the twelfth century “nuances of doctrinal understanding” did indeed begin to herald an unfolding spiritual conflict at work in history.

At the same time, the very distinction between “inner” spiritual conversion and “outer” formal or social conversion—between conversion as a change of status and as a change of belief—relies on a view of religious belief that is heavily influenced by notions of Christian piety and that is largely inappropriate, even misleading, in reference to Islam. DeWeese explains, “Islamic tradition regards even *purely* formal and ‘external’ adoption of Islamic practices and patterns as religiously meaningful, since those patterns, *even in their formal aspects*, are conveyors of divine grace.... [W]hat [this] means in the case of conversion...is that *from an Islamic perspective* there is no such thing as the purely formal or nominal or external adoption of Islam.”¹⁴ This important distinction underscores how any analysis of conversion that relies solely on Christian ideas of belief and practice—universally valuing an “inner” conversion over an outer, “formal” change of status as more spiritually authentic—risks misunderstanding the nature and meaning of religious change in other cultural contexts.

Keeping this critical caveat in mind, we can begin to consider a few examples of Islamic narratives of conversion that were contemporaneous with the Jewish and Christian texts examined in earlier chapters. As was the case in my treatment of Jewish material in [Chapter 3](#), this discussion of Islamic sources is in no way exhaustive, and the examples provided will serve mainly to contrast with the Christian accounts examined in other chapters. Nevertheless, the discussion also raises some issues that could be important for a more detailed study centered on Islamic material. Despite the important differences between Christian and Muslim notions of conversion itself, we will see that some *narrative* aspects of these Islamic accounts of conversion—the calling or prophetic dream vision, the turn away from one’s teachers or parents, the intersection with historical events—seem to closely resemble elements in Christian sources. Such parallels in structure and imagery provide good reason to consider in greater detail what such fictions of conversion to Islam might share with Christian texts and, even more critically, how the *polemical* role of these elements measure up to each other. Although, as Linda Jones has argued, “Christian and Muslim autobiographical conversion narratives developed separately *as genres*,” the function of such narratives within the context of interconfessional writing was, as we will see, in part similar.¹⁵

Not long after Moses/Petrus Alfonsi converted from Judaism to Christianity and wrote his anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim *Dialogue against the Jews*, the son of a Jew from Fez was born in Baghdad and was named Samuel (Samaw'al) by his mother. As a boy he learned the Torah and its commentaries and then moved on to Indian mathematics under a learned Muslim as well as the study of medicine and philosophy under the famous Jewish philosopher (also converted to Islam) Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. after 1164–65). Under various teachers, he studied algebra, geometry, and history. During his studies he began to doubt his Jewish faith and, after a series of prophetic dreams, he adopted Islam in 1163. On the evening after his public declaration of his new faith, he began composing what would become his anti-Jewish *Silencing the Jews* (*Ifḥām al-Yahūd*). The work circulated for four years, provoking responses against Samaw'al by Jewish readers, one of whom (in a surviving letter) challenges his "proof and demonstration" and implies that his conversion may have rather been out of "caprice, acclaim, or folly."¹⁶ Samaw'al responded by expanding his discussion and adding a new personal account narrating his life and conversion to Islam in detail. Both versions—the shorter text alone and the expanded version joined to his conversion account—seem to have circulated contemporaneously, possibly in different places. Apart from the history of the shorter version and its dissemination, the longer polemic containing the conversion narrative seems to have circulated in the eastern Mediterranean, where various copies of it survive.¹⁷ Various Muslim writers used Samaw'al's ideas in subsequent attacks on Jewish belief, and at least one criticism of Samaw'al, by the thirteenth-century Jewish writer Ibn Kammūna (d. 1284), is known. In addition, a letter from a "philosophizing heretic" criticizing Samaw'al's conversion account, along with a riposte by the latter, has also been found in various copies.¹⁸

Samaw'al's decision to expand his text to include his personal story casts into relief the meaning that his representation of conversion could have *vis-à-vis* his anti-Jewish discourse. His conversion story serves as an *ex post facto* justification for his arguments while also depending on the context of his theological and exegetical claims for its wider meaning. He begins, "I shall relate God's guidance granted to me, and how I was led since my birth from the faith of the Jews toward my conversion [*intiqālī*], that it may become an example and an exhortation to whomsoever this may reach."¹⁹ The fruit of the journey he relates is the very work of *Silencing the Jews* that he wrote four years earlier. It was "in the evening of that day," that is, the day of his decision to convert to Islam, that, he claims, he began to write the book *Silencing the Jews*. These teachings "became well-known" and "its fame was widespread

[*wa-tāra khabaruhu*],” such that various copies were made under Samaw’al’s supervision in various cities. That fame brought also the provocation to expand and justify his project. “Later I added to it many sections of polemics against the Jews on the basis of the Torah, so that it became an excellent work on polemics against the Jews, the like of which had never been produced in Islam.”²⁰ That “excellent work” is the book before the reader, and among the “many sections of polemics against the Jews” that he “later...added” is the very account of conversion that now frames, after the fact, his exegetical sortie. The new attack and the new presentation are presented as inextricably and mutually reinforcing components each of the other. I believe Samaw’al’s entire account can be read with the help of this double lens: just as narrative and polemic both stand in a clear hierarchy but also are tightly linked to each other, so other conceptual pairs are similarly proposed and then inverted over the course of the book. Three that seem to carry the most significance are authoritative tradition versus reason, fictional stories versus true histories, and prophecy versus proof. By weaving these categories together, he represents his conversion as a product of action and submission, individual experience and communal identity.

The first clue to this game of conciliating incommensurate dichotomies comes in the order of the explanation itself. Samaw’al draws a connection between his assault on Judaism and his conversion experience only at the end of his work, which itself comes years after the dissemination of his original ideas. By presenting the material in this order, he seems to subordinate his dream and conversion to the text and the claims they generate. This subordination is in keeping with the overall structure of the work, in which reason and argumentation are prized over authority and the force of tradition or prophecy. Samaw’al leads up to this conclusion by describing his education as a series of slow discoveries that followed a logical sequence. He begins by establishing his former expertise in Jewish learning. His father “was the most learned man of his time in Torah studies, and the most gifted and prolific stylist and exquisite extemporizer in Hebrew poetry and prose.” He was well-known among the “distinguished people among the Jews” living in Baghdad, and married a “distinguished sister” from Basra who was herself “well-versed in Torah studies and Hebrew learning.” She was a Levite, “a tribe of good lineage,” and both her parents were learned and well-known.²¹ Even though he leaves Judaism behind and rejects it as false, he still shows that his lineage was illustrious and his family was a pillar of learning and orthodoxy in Judaism. This depiction is the first step in his gradual rejection of authoritative tradition in favor of reason.

On his slow journey away from tradition toward reason, he exhibits his prodigious intellect and skill in mastering all subjects that were put before him, beginning with Hebrew, the Torah, and commentaries. “By the age of thirteen, I had mastered [*aḥkamtu*] this knowledge,” he writes, implying that the foundation of all further thought and argument was a “mastery” of traditional Jewish knowledge. Throughout the initial section of *Silencing*, he presents, as Ramon Martí would later do in Latin, numerous verses from the Bible in Hebrew (and sometimes from the Targum in Aramaic) and then translates the texts into Arabic. He goes to great lengths to show his authoritative knowledge of his former religion through linguistic display, familiarity with rabbinical and medieval Jewish ideas, and imitation of specific methods of Jewish textual understanding, including gematria, or numerical interpretation of the Bible.²² His recourse to Jewish language, *auctoritates*, and hermeneutics throughout *Silencing*, which things are the foundations of his own authority, is echoed by his claims to mastery of Jewish knowledge in his later conversion narrative.

From this solid basis he moved on to science and claims to have mastered “Indian reckoning” and astronomical tables by the age of fourteen. He continued to study medicine while he frequented various wise teachers to learn algebra and geometry, “until I had solved the problems from Euclid that they used to solve,” while also mastering by the age of eighteen all that his teachers offered in medical science: “My passion and love for these studies was so strong that I would forget food and drink when pondering on some of them. I secluded myself in a room for a time and analyzed all those books and expounded them; I refuted their authors wherever they committed mistakes; demonstrated the errors of their compilers; and undertook to verify or correct where other authors had failed. I found Euclid’s arrangement of the figures in his book faulty.... God has revealed to me much that had been withheld from my predecessors among the eminent scholars.”²³ In this cascade of braggadocio, Samaw’al follows the characteristic form of other Arabic *Bildung* narratives such as those of the eleventh-century philosopher Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), who, having mastered logic, geometry, and medicine by the age of sixteen, found that “the gates of knowledge began opening for me...to the point that distinguished physicians began to read the science of medicine under me,” or Samaw’al’s younger contemporary ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdādī, who brags that, after surpassing all of his various teachers, “large numbers of students flocked to me.”²⁴

In his journey from Judaism to Islam, Samaw’al’s education moves through a series of stages in which he sequentially mastered each subject before moving on to the next. These studies led to the study of

history, which proved to be the source of his doubts in his faith and his eventual conversion to Islam: "I was fascinated by records of the past and by stories, and was eager to learn what had happened in ancient times.... I therefore perused the various compilations of stories and anecdotes. Then I passed on from that stage to an infatuation with books of entertainment and long tales; later still—to the larger compilations.... I sought the real historical accounts and my interest shifted to the histories."²⁵ This move from logic to medicine to history curiously seems to be a move away from argument and proof toward "stories and anecdotes." But Samaw'al's ultimate interest was in the truth of the past. It was in this growing appreciation, brought through the appealing rhetoric of "books of entertainment and long tales," for "real historical accounts" that Samaw'al comes to question the claims of exclusive truth in Jewish belief. By placing his description of these stories and their effects after his long preparatory study, he insists that logic, science, and religious tradition formed the basis upon which he could interpret such stories correctly. This careful ordering, in which logic is given preeminence over history but at the same time is made the product of its mastery, is repeated in the text in his presentation of his dreams.

Samaw'al thus connects his study of history to his need for a rational evaluation of all beliefs handed down by tradition. By reflecting on history and tradition, he judged that "reason is the supreme arbiter" in all thought, even religious belief: "For were it not that reason directs us to follow the prophets and apostles and to trust the elders and authorities of the past, we would not accept anything transmitted on their authority.... [R]eason [*ʿaql*] does not oblige us to accept ancestral tradition [*naql*] without examining it as to its soundness...but obliges us to accept tradition only if it be a verity *per se*.... Mere reference to fathers and ancestry, however, is no proof."²⁶ The twelfth-century Christian conflict between *ratio* and *auctoritas* is paralleled by a corresponding conflict in Islamic sources between *ʿaql* (reason) and *naql* (received tradition). Samaw'al openly deprecates the latter in favor of the former and claims that this total commitment to reason leads him to his faith in Islam. The path of his logic begins with the realization that all religions are equal in terms of the transmission of their ancestral traditions. As all prophets (especially Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad) are verified in each religion, respectively, only through the transmission of tradition and not through firsthand experience, "a reasonable person cannot believe one and disbelieve another of these prophets.... [R]ather, it is rationally incumbent either to believe all of them or to reject all of them."²⁷ This exact idea is one of Samaw'al's principal points in the first section of the text, which he explains along with other assertions about the

abrogation of Jewish and Christian Scriptures.²⁸ He claims that he himself was convinced of the prophethood of Muhammad, and offers his own story as a model of action similar to what he calls for in his initial attack on Judaism.

His treatise, using a mixture of rational and Scriptural appeals, is based on familiar arguments of the equality of prophecy, the condemnation of Christian and Jewish falsification of the true prophetic message in their Scriptures, and the abrogation of these religions as corrupt and invalid. These points are reflected in the details of his conversion scene when he explains that, after arriving at his rational conclusions about prophecy, he still held off from a public conversion to Islam out of consideration for his father. These twin gestures of faith and hesitation, which he repeats after he tells of his prophetic dreams, allow him both to claim reason as the ground for his conversion and to show his deference to tradition and respect for authority. While he alternates between rational and Scriptural proofs without difficulty, in his account he presents an experience of inner conflict between reason and authority and uncertainty about how to act on his own conclusions.

Samaw'al overcomes the paralyzing irresolution brought on by this double bind by appealing to "divine help," which comes to him in a dream. While some scholars have essayed to read conversionary dream narratives in medieval Arabic writing as accurate expressions of personal identity and inner experience, it is clear that those written and included in disputational contexts such as Samaw'al's function to express, in Dwight Reynolds's words, "the displaced authority of the authorial 'I': what the author cannot say on his own authority, he can support with testimony from an outside source through the narration of a dream or vision."²⁹ By presenting his conversion in logical order among a series of experiences (learning, interest in history, reason, and finally a prophetic dream), he avoids attributing his conversion to the "logic" of dreams alone. By the same token, he can claim he was brought to Islam by God and through his attention to prophecy, not through his own ratiocination. His dreams unite his interest in aligning himself with Islamic history and his logical conclusion that all prophecies are equally valid.

In his first dream, he speaks with "the prophet Samuel," whom he finds sitting under a large tree. After greeting him, the prophet has Samaw'al read a verse from Deuteronomy, which he understands to refer to Muhammad. The prophet asks him to interpret it but grows impatient with Samaw'al's answers and departs angrily. Samaw'al awoke "in terror" and suddenly understood the dream as "an act of grace from God...an exhortation that is to remove the doubt that has been preventing me from professing the true creed and openly

embracing Islam.”³⁰ This dream convinced him to convert, and he began to pray to God as a new Muslim, but eventually he fell asleep again, dreaming a second dream. In this second dream, a Sufi mystic finds him on a busy street and leads him to visit the prophet Muhammad in a nearby house, which Samaw’al describes in detail. As he approaches the prophet, he passes many armed men “dressed for travel.” He then entered the courtyard where Muhammad, “smiling and benevolent,” was standing. “I rushed toward him and stretched out my hand toward his. He stretched out his noble hand to me and put it in my hand. I said: ‘I testify that there is but one God and that thou art the Messenger of God.’...I saw he was filled with joy.”³¹ This description serves to prove that Samaw’al underwent an internal conversion to Islam and also officially adopted Islam by pronouncing the *Shahāda*, the Islamic Profession of Faith, even though he delayed in publicly announcing his conversion. It also authenticates his rational conversion not only through the proof provided by his own reason but also through prophecy about Muhammad given by God.

This appeal to prophecy alongside his rational proof is fused with an appeal to the power of storytelling alongside the unfolding of real history. After testifying in his second dream to the singularity of God before Muhammad himself, the prophet invites him on a voyage of conquest. At first seized with fear of a voyage at sea, Samaw’al quickly remembers his new faith and feels renewed confidence. In particular, upon observing a number of humble Sufis prepare for battle, he remembers his fascination with chronicles of Muslim conquests: “Ever since I was young and had read the stories of the rise of Muslim power it had been impressed upon my imagination how the companions of the Prophet were weak, poor...and yet were victorious over powerful and huge armies and numerous cavalry. So when I saw the three [Sufis] I said: These are the warriors and conquerors in the holy war, these are the companions of the Prophet; with these shall I travel and go forth to conquer. Tears rolled from my eyes in sleep, so great was my joy and happiness over them.”³² The critical importance of this moment, which is the dramatic peripety of his conversion, contrasts sharply with the commentary that immediately follows his narrative. In proffering this double explanation of conversion through both proof and prophecy, he first offers his dream and then immediately rejects it. In explaining why he did not tell anyone of his dreams for another four years—during which time the first version of his anti-Jewish work circulated and became popular—he claims he was “loath to mention” what he could not prove rationally lest the reader think it was unbelievable or his critics say “He left his religion on account of a dream he had seen; he was deceived by jumbled dreams.”³³ In offering these explanations, he also denies that his dream had any

decisive role in his conversion: “The reader of these pages should now understand that it was not the dream that had induced me to abandon my first faith. A sensible man will not be deceived about his affairs by dreams and visions, without proof or demonstration. But I had known for a long time the proofs and demonstrations and arguments for the prophethood of our master Muhammad.... [I]t was those proofs and demonstrations that were the cause for my conversion.... [A]s for the dream, it served merely to alert and to prod me out of my procrastination and inertia.”³⁴ This concluding disclaimer reinforces the logic of his earlier statements in favor of Islam, in which authoritative tradition, *naql*, could not be accepted alone and had to be confirmed with reason, *‘aql*. For Samaw’al, *auctoritas* seems to have had, in Alain of Lille’s words, a nose of wax. As he claims earlier in his story, “Reason is the supreme arbiter and...its rule should be established generally in the affairs of...our world.”³⁵

This total rejection of authoritative tradition not augmented by reason, however, is in constant tension with his ongoing deference to his father, who “loved [him] intensely.” It was his father who insisted on his education in science and logic, the very disciplines that Samaw’al claims led to his later arguments against Judaism. Samaw’al deduces the truth of Islam through logic but still holds off converting out of respect for his father. He thus emerges as one who was faithful and loyal to his tradition but who was forced to convert by God’s will. His conversion is the product of the providence of God, who “predestined” and “set in advance” everything that was to occur in Samaw’al’s life. As we saw earlier, he claims, “[I was] led since my birth from the faith of the Jews toward my conversion.”³⁶ Moreover, the fact that he dreams of Muhammad ensures, according to traditions of dream interpretation in Islam, the truth of his dream as prophecy by God and not delusion by the Devil.³⁷ Just as his filial piety explains his delay in acting, the sure presence of God’s will exonerates Samaw’al from any insult that comes with his later conversion. As soon as his father learns of the reasons for his son’s apostasy, reasons “he would not deny and could not refute,” he suddenly dies, a victim of God’s will rather than his son’s infidelity. Samaw’al, once a pious Jew and now a faithful Muslim, simply followed his destiny, choosing what was rational but also heeding what was revealed. Although he claims his conversion was fully the product of reason, his representation of that conversion through narrative actually resembles the descriptions of his Christian contemporaries Moses/Petrus and Judah/Herman in its appeal to reason and authority together.

This double trajectory, combining an analeptic vision of the past and its authoritative prophecy with a proleptic vision of the unfolding future and the logical subsumption under it of all that came before,

can be brought into focus by contrasting the imagery of the prophets in his two dreams. In his first dream, he sees the prophet Samuel as a symbol of the past, a “grave old man with very white hair.” The old and venerable prophet is idle in the shade of a tree in a verdant countryside and points back to the prophecy of the past and calls for its correct understanding.³⁸ In his second dream, by contrast, he sees Muhammad within a courtyard in an urban setting, “standing” and busily “occupied.” He is depicted as “distinguished looking” with a skin color “between pale and ruddy,” with black eyes and a beard and hair of medium length. Rather than being “grave,” “old,” and “angry” like the prophet Samuel, Muhammad is middle-aged, smiling, and “filled with joy.” Rather than calling Samaw’al to read and interpret, Muhammad calls him to action and conquest. As Samaw’al leaves Muhammad’s side after agreeing to join him in battle, he says, “I did not find...the darkness that had been there when I entered.”³⁹ Through these pairs of opposed images, Samaw’al implies that Judaism—the religion of those who believe in Samuel but not in Muhammad—is a religion of memory and commemoration of the past, a rural past in the shadows of time and action. Islam, by contrast—the religion of those who accept both Samuel and Muhammad and all other prophets besides—is seen as a force on the cusp of history, a forward-driving and inclusive religion of action that spreads from darkness to light and from rural wilderness to urban empire.

Similarly, the method of interpreting sacred history is conspicuously different in the two dreams, and Samaw’al leaves behind a purely interpretive textual model for one based on action. In his first dream, the prophet Samuel commands him to read Deuteronomy 33:2 in Hebrew (“The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran”). The prophet then said that “the meaning of this is an allusion to a prophecy that will be revealed” and Samaw’al “realized he meant Muhammad...because he is the one sent from the mountains of Paran.”⁴⁰ As we know from the first, expository section of *Silencing*, Sinai pertains to the revelation to the Jews and Seir to the revelation to the Christians. This interpretation presents a sort of prophetic prediction in which later events fulfill earlier prophecy through the unfolding of concrete history, all leading to the revelation to Muhammad on Paran, which is “the mountain of Mecca.”⁴¹ Although Samaw’al’s text seems on the surface to resemble Christian conversion texts in its details, we can differentiate its historical interpretation from Saul/Paul’s typological reading of Mount Sinai in Galatians 4:24–26, where he equates the mountain with Hagar and “the present Jerusalem” and then contrasts it to Sarah, who signifies “the Jerusalem above.” Also we can juxtapose this exegetical content in

Samaw'al's first dream with the call to arms in his second dream, which includes no textual citation or interpretation. As he meets Muhammad and makes his profession of Islam, Samaw'al gives up meditation on prophecy to embrace the unfolding of history around him. In this conversion, Samaw'al moves from text to action, from reading to battle, and his trajectory is epitomized by the "companions of the Prophet" he sees after visiting Muhammad, dressed in "the raiment of ascetics" and carrying bows, javelins, and swords.

These double images in which Islam embraces prophecy and action, mysticism and war, also define Samaw'al's image of his conversion as the product of both fictional stories and concrete history. In this depiction, he again provides a paradoxical double reading of his experience and actions in adopting Islam. Just as his interest in making "reason the supreme judge" was coupled with a forbearance of action out of respect for traditional authority, and just as he claimed his conversion was both a product of rational proof and the unfolding of divine providence and predestination, so here he melds his love of past stories with a commitment to present and future history. In all of the histories he enjoys as a young man, it is the fictional story of Burzōē, the physician in the widely popular collection of frame tales *Kalilah and Dimna*, that ultimately led Samaw'al to connect his interest in legends of the past with his sense of the truth of tradition. While Burzōē is a character in this narrative fiction, he is also the real-life translator of the Sanskrit *Panchtantra* into Persian, the version that would later form the basis of the Arabic *Kalilah*. Following his illustrious upbringing, Burzōē begins to doubt the foundation of all religious truth and slowly, through reflection and medical study, comes to believe reason could be the sole arbiter between different traditions and finally accepts no single religion as exclusively true. Burzōē's story, along with the autobiographical *On My Books* of the ancient physician Galen, provided the template for a number of autobiographical works in the Arabic tradition, including Al-Ghazālī's *Deliverance from Error*. As critics have noted, Burzōē's story is presented as a "spiritual autobiography" whose structure and argument Samaw'al closely imitated in constructing his drama.⁴² The story of Burzōē is fictionalized in the narrative frame of the Arabic *Kalilah*, and this tale inspired Samaw'al to convert. His real conversion then acquired its form and meaning as the fictionalized story appended to his text *Silencing the Jews*. Nevertheless, Samaw'al draws a conclusion opposite that of Burzōē. Whereas the fictional doctor came to see limited equality of all religions and ultimately favored an ascetic ecumenism, Samaw'al concludes his rational comparison of all religious traditions by seeing Islam as the final truth that encapsulates and surpasses all others.⁴³ Narrative and action, prophecy and

polemic, form the chains of transmission within which spiritual conversion constitutes a central link.

This inversion of the message contained in the story of Burzōē is one of a series of inversions and paradoxes through which Samaw'al creates the drama of his conversion. The interpretive voice with which Samaw'al the author tries to define and explain the actions of Samaw'al the character—the same voice that speaks through the whole of the anti-Jewish attack—is subsumed into the text as yet another fictional discourse. This fictionalization of the voice of the author allows him to insist without contradiction on a double meaning to his conversion. On the one hand, he affirms the singular meaning and motivation of his conversion (“It was those proofs and demonstrations that were the cause for my conversion”) and rejects the fiction of his dreams in favor of “real historical accounts” (“A sensible man will not be deceived...by dreams and visions”). Moreover, by placing his autobiographical account *after* his polemic and by leaving his dreams for the very end of his account, *after* he already provided his reasons for accepting Islam, Samaw'al sought to paint his conversion as a product of logic and reason. On the other hand, he attributes the rational proofs that led him to convert to the fiction of *Kalilah and Dimna* and even dramatizes his initial, spiritual conversion not only as a private, interior experience but also as a dream that he kept secret for four years. Although he places the core conclusions of *Silencing the Jews* both temporally and textually before his conversion account, he claims that the events of the narrative preceded and inspired the attack that followed.

This constant alternation between narrative and argument, dream and reason, Samaw'al-the-author and Samaw'al-the-character transforms history, both real events and textual representations of them, into the key by which all meaning in the text is revealed.⁴⁴ By placing history at the apex of this dramatic pyramid, *Silencing* expresses the central theme of both the autobiographical and doctrinal sections, in both the initial and expanded versions: the abrogation of all past interpretations or misinterpretations of prophecy by the final revelation of Islam. This message, by which Jews are “silenc[ed] and muzzl[ed]...with their very own data,” does not characterize the past as a necessary precondition of the future or see Judaism per se as a precondition for the message of Islam.⁴⁵ As Islamic history swallows up and abrogates all that came before it in the undeniable hegemony of the present, Judaism is shown to be a corruption of the true prophecy, an unnecessary deviation from the single truth revealed to Jesus, Muhammad, and all the prophets. Judaism is thus exposed as false and rejected without being called as an exclusive witness to the truth of Islam.

Samaw'al's work can be set within the wider context of numerous other well-known conversions of Jews to Islam, including those of the famous Fatimid Vizier Ya'qūb ibn Killis (d. 991), the philosopher and physician Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, and his disciple Isaac ibn 'Ezra' (son of the poet Abraham ibn 'Ezra', d. ca. 1164).⁴⁶ The letters and *responsa* discussing conversion to Islam written by Maimonides, about whose own possible feigned apostasy some still speculate, signal the centrality of the issue for Jews of the twelfth century living in Islamic lands.⁴⁷ Samaw'al's case is unique in its treatment of conversion and apostasy because of its elaborate form and its complex connection between this narrative development and Samaw'al's larger proposition.

Samaw'al's story distinguishes itself by conceding a more important symbolic role to conversion than can be found in many sources from the first centuries of Islam, and a number of texts in the subsequent two centuries follow his model. Like Samaw'al, whose representation of conversion dramatizes a historical process of abrogation in which Judaism and Christianity are swept aside to make way for the inclusive historical vision of Islam's final prophecy, the later authors that I examine next do not enlist their former Jewish selves in order to *authorize* their faith. Rather, they tell their stories principally to explain the natural process of how they came to convert. The theological history that these stories embody is one that unfolds toward Islam rather than connecting past and future through a figural, circular dialectic. As a result, the narrative elements become simplified and their emplotment is comparatively logical and schematic.

These patterns can be seen clearly when we compare Samaw'al's *Silencing* to two short accounts of conversion from Judaism to Islam in North Africa that are roughly contemporary with the writing of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid, those of Sa'īd Ḥasan of Alexandria (converted in 1298) and a Ceuta-born Jew, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī (fl. second half of the fourteenth century). In both of these works, as in Samaw'al's, the primary goal of the text is argumentation against Judaism. Unlike the account in Samaw'al's *Silencing*, however, these very brief conversion narratives are integrated into the main body of the texts they accompany. Earlier critics have read these for clues about the biographies of the authors or insight into their alleged motives for conversion, connecting these motives to wider historical factors of Jewish experience under Islamic rule in North Africa.⁴⁸ Turning away from this psychological-biographical approach in order

to pursue a textual-critical one, we can see that these stories, despite their brevity, play an important role within the scheme of their authors and work in tandem with contentions of the main body of texts that contain them.

The work of Saʿīd Ḥasan, entitled *Paths of Investigation about the Prophethood of the Lord of Mankind* (*Masālik al-naẓar fī nubūwati sayyid al-bashar*), completed around the time of the conversion to Christianity of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid (1320), offers a litany of examples of Muhammad's prophethood drawn mostly from the Hebrew Bible and in a few cases from the Gospels and the Qurān. Saʿīd introduces each example with the formulaic phrases "Another indication of his prophetic office is..." and "Know also that..." giving his text the form of a list of *auctoritates* more than a developed argument. Saʿīd's two principal themes are that Jewish and Christian Scriptures announced that Muhammad was to be prophet, and that both of these religions are guilty of idolatry and image worship. Saʿīd is so concerned with the pernicious effects of image worship that he believes even the Muslims are at risk of retribution by God if they do not forbid and destroy Christian and Jewish houses of worship where such things are found. In claiming that Jewish and Christian Scriptures point to the prophethood of Muhammad, Saʿīd thus connects his text directly to earlier works, like Samaw'al's *Silencing the Jews*, in arguing against the falsification (*taḥrīf*) of Scripture as the reason for Jewish and Christian error.

Like *Silencing*, *Paths of Investigation* includes the conversion story after the main body of doctrinal points, but instead of being presented as an appendix or afterword to the work and added only years later, it functions as an organic part of the original. In moving from the position of a postscript, as in Samaw'al's case, to that of a conclusion to the original work, Saʿīd's conversion narrative more closely resembles and reinforces the polemic in which it is embedded. The story begins with the same language as each of the examples presented earlier in the treatise: "Know...that I was one of the learned men of the Children of Israel, but God bestowed Islam upon me."⁴⁹ This "bestowing" appears not as something extra added to the main text but as one of the principal arguments of it. Situating the account in this way, Saʿīd makes no attempt to downplay the importance of his personal experience, as Samaw'al does. Rather, he moves seamlessly from Scriptural proof to rational appeal to personal testimony, making no distinction between the levels of his rhetorical appeal.

Despite this important difference from Samaw'al's *Silencing the Jews*, Saʿīd's narrative also seems to imitate it in many ways. Like Samaw'al's experience as presented in his text, Saʿīd's conversion comes through a dream vision, but rather than occurring as the

product of normal sleep, it is provoked by the sleep of sickness: “The occasion [of my conversion] was this: I became ill and a physician was attending me. The shroud of death was prepared for me, and then I saw in my sleep one speaking who said, ‘Read the [Qur’ānic] sura *al-Ḥamd*; then you will escape death.’ So when I awoke from my sleep I immediately sought one of the trustworthy Muslims. He was my neighbor, and I grasped his hand, saying, ‘I bear witness that there is no God but Allāh, he alone, and he has no partner; and I bear witness that Muhammad is his servant and apostle, whom he has sent with guidance and the true religion, to make it triumph over every religion.’”⁵⁰ Saʿīd recovers from his illness, mentioning it no more. His illness and recovery operate within the text as symbolic markers of his passage from error to truth and his conversion through a death and rebirth. As in Samaw’al’s first dream, in which the prophet Samuel tells him, “Read what you find before you,” Saʿīd is told to read from the Qur’ān. He also awakens and proceeds directly to his conversion, just as Samaw’al awoke from his first dream and understood immediately that God was calling him to embrace Islam. But rather than falling back asleep and performing his decisive act of witnessing (the *Shahāda*) within his dream, as Samaw’al does, Saʿīd “immediately sought” his neighbor. Rather than speaking to a specter in a dream, he pronounces his faith before a real, living person close to him who could corroborate his act.

Even so, the reality of this concrete act is subtly blended with a renewed dream-like rhetoric, similar to the moment in Samaw’al’s text when he writes, “Drowsiness overwhelmed me while I was pondering.” While this drowsiness precedes and leads into his second dream and his profession of faith, Saʿīd’s second vision follows after his profession of faith: “When I entered the mosque and saw the Muslims in rows like ranks of angels, a voice within me said, ‘This is the nation concerning whose appearance the prophets preached good tidings!’”⁵¹ After he is moved by the admonitory sermon, the sight repeated itself, this time with a sharper edge: “When the prayers began, I was greatly moved, because I saw the rows of the Muslims like rows of angels.... [T]hen a voice within me said, ‘If the revelation of God came to the Children of Israel twice in the course of time, then it comes to this people in every prayer.’” These semi-oneiric voices and visions of praying Muslims “like angels” provide a subtle confirmation of his first dream and convince him that he chose his new faith correctly. At that moment, he writes, “I was convinced that I was created to be a Muslim only; and my conversion [*Islāmī*] took place [shortly after].”⁵² Like Samaw’al, who authenticates his vision by relating his dream about the prophet Muhammad himself—a sure sign of true communication from God—Saʿīd presents his conversion

as the product of prophetic revelation. He underscores this interpretation by framing his narrative with a Qur'ānic verse about prophecy (46:51), explaining that prophecy can come in many forms, including through revelation in one's sleep, implying that his experience was a direct prophetic message from God. To this end, he also prefaces his dream story by the description of a dream of Solomon, in which the prophet met a dead man. He concludes this parallel prophetic dream story with a well-known *ḥadīth* claiming that "the prophet said that the trustworthy vision is one of forty-six parts of prophecy" and suggesting that his dream was partly a revelation from God and that it commanded the authority of other prophecies.⁵³ Like Samaw'al, Sa'īd combines extensive arguments based on both logic and Scripture with the testimony of his private experience. He appeals to both reason and authority while at the same moment claiming that his conversion was predestined by God.

Rather than following his testimony of faith with plans for physical conquest, as Samaw'al did—a journey to the East to spread the faith of Islam—Sa'īd immediately connects his conversion with *textual* polemic. He does this first by affirming that Islam was revealed in order "to make it triumph over every religion." This is reinforced later when he claims he set out to organize a debate with Jews and Christians in order to refute them:

I set out and went forth with a petition for the forming of a council to consider the belief in God Almighty, in which there should be ten of the learned men of the Jews and ten Christian priests, in the presence of the learned men of the Muslims and in the presence of the king; and in their hands should be the Torah, the Gospels, the Psalms and the books of the prophets...and that I should make clear what they had changed and altered and substituted in the word of God Almighty; and also that I should explain and prove the prophecy of the Chosen (and he is Muhammad...) from the Torah, the Gospels, the Psalms, and the books of the prophets; and that I should establish from their books the reasons, the proofs and the arguments for the abolition of pictures and likenesses from the synagogues/churches.⁵⁴

Although the debate, as far as we know, never came to pass, Sa'īd explicitly links the composition of this text with the conversion story related in it. In *Paths of Investigation*, he presents the pro-Islamic ideas that were "established] from their books."

The arguments of his work, moreover, which include these barbs against Christianity within the larger attack on Judaism, form part of his basic declaration of faith. Just as Samaw'al began composing his book on the very day of his dreams, Sa'īd begins conceiving his case

even as he performs the profession of faith that marks his conversion. In an uncanny parallel with the conversion of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid, Saʿīd not only gives the date of composition as 1320, some twenty-two years after his conversion, but also links his text and his conversion to the moment when he personally heard about the historical event of the conversion to Islam of the Mongol prince Ghāzān Khān in 1295—the very year of the failed messianic movements of Ávila and Ayllón and the year given by Abner/Alfonso in the *Teacher of Righteousness* as the beginning of the doubts that led to his conversion.⁵⁵ Just like Samawʿal and Abner/Alfonso, Saʿīd interweaves text, history, and personal confession in a way that portrays inner change as a historical process and reveals the explicitly *textual* nature of his transformation. Like these writers, Saʿīd constructs conversion as a form of polemical discourse that works in tandem with claims of reason and authority while being grounded in a shared history of communal conversion. This interweaving of discourses is reflected in the thematic order of the book. What is claimed to be first in time—the conversion and its declaration—is presented as last in the text. By invoking his conversion as one of the arguments and by presenting his treatise as its natural outcome, Saʿīd himself stands in for the council of ten Christians and ten Jews as well as the learned men of the Muslims. This very book laid before the reader is the fruit of the author’s adoption of Islam, constructed in a way that leads backward through time to its source.



The movement of the conversion narrative from being a postscript in Samawʿal’s *Silencing* to being the concluding proof text in Saʿīd’s *Paths* signifies an important shift in its role in the polemic. Unlike Samawʿal, who alternates between denying any importance to his dreams and invoking their prophetic veracity, Saʿīd makes no attempt to separate his religious arguments from his personal story. This same perspective is even more pronounced in a slightly later anti-Jewish tractate by another converted North African Jew, *The Outstretched Sword in Refutation of the Jewish Sages* (*Al-Sayf al-mamdūd fī l-radd ʿalā aḥbār al-yahūd*), by the fourteenth-century convert ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī. Virtually nothing is known of this author other than that he was born in Ceuta. His text, tentatively dated to the last decade of the fourteenth century, consists of five chapters on common themes of dispute: proof of Muhammad’s prophethood, the importance of abrogation (*naskh*) in the unfolding of prophecy, the falsification (*tahṛīf*) of Scripture by Jews and Christians, the insults of Jews against

the prophets, and others. In contrast to Sa'īd's treatise earlier in the century, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq's opens with rather than concludes with the depiction of his conversion from Judaism. If we consider Samaw'al's text as a strategic postscript to his rational deductions, and Sa'īd's text as the concluding example in a string of proofs, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq's is—similar to the style of the Christian sources considered earlier—the opening frame to his offensive. This organization brings the author's conversion to the forefront of his overall argument, both literally and hermeneutically.

By shifting the remarks about his conversion to the opening, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq gives his story a heightened importance in the overall structure of his text, an importance that is belied by the brevity and formulaic generality of those remarks. Unlike Samaw'al and Sa'īd, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq does not claim that he had a dream or revelation and does not elaborate on the process that led him to convert. He simply claims, "Sixteen years ago, [God] revealed to me [*kāna aṭla'anī*] the truth of which the rational person does not doubt and none but the absurd are suspicious."⁵⁶ He casts this hasty revelation in terms of the will of God to convert him and his destiny to be converted, and contrasts it with the necessary prior state of divinely willed ignorance. When God discloses his true fate to him, he realizes he will be saved only through his dissemination of theological doctrines such as the affirmation of God's unity (rather than trinity) and the denial that God possesses anthropomorphic characteristics: "It was part of the wisdom of God that [my destiny] remain concealed and secret within Him without his revelation or manifestation until He favored me and inspired me [to know] that this destiny was not sufficient for me nor was it going to save me but rather that it was my duty to spread [the teaching] of His unity and proclaim His non-human character and his glory, making known the faith in His prophet Muhammad."⁵⁷

These elements of concealment or revelation and conversion through divine decree are the only sources of drama. They perfunctorily appear in the midst of what are otherwise formulaic arguments and doctrinal niceties. In fulfilling the promise of the "mercies bestowed from God" in calling him, his "true" conversion comes in the affirmation of monotheism in philosophical terminology. When he realized that being preordained by God to convert was not in itself enough to save him, he writes, "I hastened to do that which would save me from painful punishment and which would bring me close to tranquil paradises. In this way, I began to speak the words of [God's] unity and lack of human attributes, testifying that there is no God but the One God, who has no equal, and testifying that Muhammad is his servant and messenger."⁵⁸ With these few narrative events, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq emphasizes not his own agency but the central

importance of God as the source and cause of his conversion. “We would not have found the path if God had not directed us.... He chooses whom he will and directs well whom he will. One does not ask him for reasons for his actions but one has to respond to them.”⁵⁹ His faith is a matter of the fulfillment of destiny, a small part of the overall unfolding and achievement of God’s universal plan.

Although ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s adoption of Islam is described as a simple profession of faith undertaken without reference to personal circumstance or individual will, the effects of his change are treated in more active, detailed terms. He explicitly connects his being chosen by God with the undertaking of a public mission. He claims he has a “duty” to “spread” teaching about God, to “proclaim” his nature and to “make known” his prophecy, and he realizes these goals by composing and publishing the anti-Jewish attack that follows.⁶⁰ His conversion, like that of Marius Victorinus in Augustine’s *Confessions*, is thus a cause for other conversions. He boasts, “Through me, by the grace of Almighty God, my people [i.e., relatives] and children, and all of much good fortune among those who were attached to me converted to Islam.”⁶¹ ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq stresses his missionary and confrontational identity in the preamble to the work, in which he extols himself as “he who makes the law of Muhammad triumph [*nāṣir al-sharī‘ah al-muhammadiyah*].” He describes how his turn to Islam quickly became the path to a new vocation as a polemical author, one that particularly suited him by virtue of his knowledge of his former religion:

When God, praised be He, granted me this grace, one of the scholars of the city of Ceuta...made me see that I was familiar [enough] with exposition of that with which the Jews, may Almighty God damn them, occupy themselves—an aberration, an abominable infidelity, an idolatry against God...[so that] I could, God willing, erase their beliefs and diminish their influence. I asked God—there is no other but Him—for help in that which had been suggested to me...drawing conclusions against them [the Jews] with robust arguments and decisive proofs.... I have limited myself to that which appears in their falsified books, which they will not be able to deny or remove.⁶²

While his conversion is characterized tersely and with spare explanation, the work that this conversion led him to compose receives a fuller description. Whereas his conversion is described with only a few phrases (God “revealed,” “favored,” “inspired,” and “made me see,” and “I took up,” “began to pronounce,” and “testif[ied]”), the lack of faith of the Jews receives a more colorful treatment (it is “an aberration,” “an infidelity,” “an idolatry,” an “abomination,” a

“falsification”). ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s ability to experience both of these is the basis of his ability to speak and write as an anti-Jewish author. Because of his insider knowledge, he attains a new agency as one able to “erase” and “diminish,” to “draw conclusions” and “show” their error through “robust arguments and decisive proofs.” His short narrative of conversion to Islam provides an opening frame that contains the anti-Jewish claims in the five chapters that follow, but after this brief introduction he does not mention his conversion again.

‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s text provides an important counterpoint for comparison with other accounts of conversion from Judaism to Islam, like those of Samaw’al and Sa’id Ḥasan. In comparison with both of these, the *Outstretched Sword* develops the dramatic components of its conversion account to a much lesser degree, including hardly any development of its scene or characters. It provides little preview of future events or reflection on past experience, its events and actions are few and only barely developed, its use of metaphor is minimal, and its employment of dramatic tension and climactic release is virtually nonexistent. This is markedly different from Samaw’al’s account of his early education and his two detailed dreams and Sa’id’s illness, dream, and waking vision of Muslims in prayer like angels. At the same time, this decline in narrative complexity accompanies an increase in the prominence of the narrative positioning within the whole text. As the function of the conversion account shifts from postscript to conclusion to introductory frame, it not only becomes more visible, but it also provides the opening context and defines what follows more obviously as direct results of the author’s experience. Whereas Samaw’al denies that his dreams—the very locus of his profession of faith—were a reason for his conversion and focuses only on his rational arguments, and while Sa’id positions his conversion only at the end of a long discussion about prophecy, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq emphasizes the centrality of his conversion for the composition of his work. As he explains, it was only because he was “familiar” with Jewish belief that he was able to argue against it. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s notion of authority is far from Samaw’al’s eschewal of any personal details and denial of the importance of his conversion story as “a matter that could not be proved.”

The explanation for this apparent paradox—the more involved the narrative, the less prominent its polemical function—underscores the most salient aspect of these accounts of conversion from Judaism to Islam: their chronological linearity. As implicit representations not merely of the individual experiences of the converts but of Islamic history itself, their most aggressive forms are their most direct. Like revelation itself, as it is characterized in Islamic sources such as those references by Samaw’al in his account of his education, Islam is the

culmination of a historical process of the clarification of truth. Muhammad's prophecy marks the final stage in a progressive sloughing off of perversion and falsification, an increasing purification of a single, unchanging message. In all three texts, the primary argument centers on a historical account of Islam's abrogation of earlier errors. Although Islamic belief, like that of Judaism and Christianity, contains a variety of time concepts (cyclical, linear, and, most predominantly, what Pierre Bourdieu terms "occasional" or "atomistic"), most claims against Christian and Jewish history are articulated in terms that are progressive and historically unidirectional.⁶³ Islam constitutes a final clarification of the falsifications of past recipients of God's single, eternal prophetic message. The very fact that Islam's later abrogation was prophesied in the Hebrew Bible and Gospels itself is tacit proof that Jews and Muslims perverted the true meaning of their texts in order to hide this fact from later believers. In 'Abd al-Ḥaqq's words, this emphasizes the "certainty of the abrogation [*bayān al-nāsikh*]" of Judaism by Islam. Just as Jewish and Christian conversion stories have been seen to reflect the distinct notion of salvation history particular to each faith, and these notions have been put to different uses in each case, so the Islamic conversion accounts examined here reflect a distinctly Islamic notion of supersessionism, one more historical than exegetical. As I argued in my reading of Samaw'al, this notion is focused on the unfolding of worldly history as proof of the truth of God's revelation to Muhammad.

Thus, this particular Islamic view of abrogation and salvation history takes a different form than that found in Christian and Jewish stories. The examples examined here most closely mirror this historical process when they present it as an ordered process of the clarification of truth and the destruction of infidelity, not as a circular narrative premised on prefiguration or on the dialectical alternation between blindness and insight. In other words, because their final message is to affirm the place of Islam as the end of prophecy and the final clarification of God's will, conversion to Islam, in the sources examined here, is linked most directly to pro-Muslim apology when it is presented in its most chronological form, forward-rather than backward-looking. Samaw'al's account, with the elaborateness of its plot and the circularity of its language, is provided only as an afterword added onto the core of a free-standing diatribe. By contrast, the appositeness of 'Abd al-Ḥaqq's conversion as a window onto his reasoning—and its explicit prominence as the opening to the entire work—is the direct and logical result of its *lack* of any similar narrative deviations or embellishments. Their dramatic form corresponds to their textual function as either introducing or

concluding the arguments.

TRADUTTORE TRADITORE: THE FRIAR'S TALE OF ANSELM TURMEDA/ʿABD ALLĀH AL-TURJUMĀN

The preceding comparison of the writings by Samaw'al al-Maghribī, Sa'īd Ḥasan, and 'Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī—texts from the twelfth century to the fourteenth—builds on their affinity as records of conversion from Judaism to Islam. These texts, as I have suggested, share not only a theological horizon, but also a wider historical context in which the norms and privileges of the majority culture effectuated a hegemonic pressure toward assimilation on minority populations. In order to bring out the importance of this two-faceted meaning, I now turn to a radically different example of the representation of conversion to Islam: that of the fifteenth-century friar Anselm Turmeda (d. 1423), known to some after his conversion as 'Abd Allāh al-Turjumān (i.e., “the dragoman” or “interpreter”). In contrast to the examples considered earlier, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh's Arabic work, *Gift of the Learned One for the Refutation of the People of the Cross* (*Tuḥfat al-adīb fī al-radd ʿalā ahl al-ṣalīb*), written around 1420, includes an elaborate tale of conversion from Christianity to Islam along with an account of his relocation to Tunis. This is provided in part 1, followed by a panegyric of the Ḥafṣid rulers Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad and his son Abū Fāris 'Abd al-ʿAzīz in part 2 and an attack on Christianity in part 3.⁶⁴ In the opening, the author presents his narrative persona as the *auctor* behind the arguments and places the story of his conversion as the opening frame of the entire anti-Christian treatise. In looking more closely at the connection between the polemic and the opening scene, we will see that, even more than in the case of Giuàn/Obadiah's account of his conversion to Judaism, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh's narrative closely resembles Christian models such as those of Augustine and Moses/Petrus Alfonsi.

Although critics have called into question Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh's authorship of the last of the work's three sections—charges I consider in more detail below—all have accepted as authentic part 1, which presents the author's conversion story, because it incorporates numerous local details particular to his life and experience. As in my reading of Juan Andrés in [Chapter 1](#), my reading here does not depend on the reality of the person depicted in the text or the certainty of its authorship. In his characterization of his education and the manner of his conversion, the narrator, whom we can call Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh, includes abundant details about what he claims was his native home of Mallorca. “Know then,” he begins, “that I am

originally from the city of Mallorca (may God Almighty return her to Islam!), a large city on the coast that lies in a small valley between two mountains.... [T]he city is known by the name of the island.”⁶⁵ The author proceeds to impart detailed information about Mallorca’s commercial activity, its olives and other crops, its export of oil, and other physical and agricultural characteristics of the island. Such detailed description of his physical surroundings is oddly interspersed with an account of his education. After his early studies, he says he went to the mainland city of Lleida: “In this city there is an abundance of fruit, and I have seen the peasants there split peaches [to dry them] in quarters.... [T]he most common plant in its hinterlands is saffron. I studied natural sciences and astrology there for six years.”⁶⁶ This alternation between geography and intellectual biography and between trivia and fictional development serves to paint a rich backdrop on which individual experience and action are limned as concrete, historical realities.

This evocation of the physical reality of his world is one of various techniques in which Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh emplots his change to Islam by mapping his spiritual metamorphosis onto his physical migrations. By characterizing his physical movement in this way, he also measures the degree of his spiritual change and endows his journey with a tangible reality. His physical surroundings lend credibility to his descriptions of the almost fantastic ease with which he mastered the subjects of his education and the precociousness with which he moved to higher subjects. At the age of six, he was sent by his father, whom he boasts was an important person in Mallorca, to study with a priest: “I studied the Gospels until, in the space of two years, I had memorized more than half of them. I then began a six-year course of study in the language of the Gospels and the science of Logic.”⁶⁷ His precociousness and itinerancy contrast with the character of his subsequent ten-year study in Bologna—“a large city whose buildings are of strong red baked brick”—with one Nicolau Martello, “an old priest who was of very high rank [*kabīru l-qadri*].” Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh describes him as one of the greatest living authorities in Christendom: “His status among them in knowledge, observance, and asceticism was very high. He was peerless in these characteristics in his time among all the people of Christendom. Questions, particularly those concerning religion, would be brought to him from distant regions from kings and others.... [W]ith this priest I studied the principles and the details of the Christian religion.”⁶⁸ In Bologna Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh took Franciscan orders and remained under his master’s guidance until the decisive moment of his decision to convert. The emphasis placed on Martello’s unmatched authority on the subject of Christianity corresponds to Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s earlier description of his

prodigious mastery of Christian ideas and texts. Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh, it seems, excelled in every way, and it is fitting that he finished his studies with the greatest authority in Christendom.

Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s course of study becomes a slow process of drawing nearer to Martello’s eminence and authority and mirrors his gradual penetration into the true meaning of prophetic revelation and his eventual conversion. Over the course of ten years of study, he “grew closer and closer to him” and eventually was given keys to his house.⁶⁹ This intimacy provides the necessary pretext for the action of the story. Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh relates that one day, Martello unexpectedly fell ill and did not come to the day’s lesson, and so the students held the class in his absence.⁷⁰ Their discussion centered on the nature of the “paraclete,” or advocate, whom Jesus mentions repeatedly in the Gospel of John (e.g., 15:26). Following the day’s debate, he told Martello what he and the others proposed about the meaning of the Paraclete on the basis of some well-known exegetes, but Martello gently informed him that none of these explanations was correct. Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh then rushed to “kiss his feet” and begged to find out the true meaning of this mysterious name:

The priest then began to weep and said to me, “My son, God knows that you are very dear to me because of your service and devotion to me. Knowledge of this holy name is indeed a great benefit, but I fear that if this knowledge were revealed to you that the Christian masses would kill you immediately.” I said to him, “Master, by God Almighty...I shall never speak of anything you confide to me in secret except at your command!” Then he said to me, “...Know, then, my son, that the Paraclete is one of the names of our Prophet Muhammad....” I responded, “But, Master, what then do you say of the religion of the Christians?” He replied, “My son, if the Christians had persisted in the original religion of Jesus, they would indeed belong to the religion of God, for the religion of Jesus and of all the Prophets...is that of God.” “But what then is one to do in this matter?” I asked. He said, “My son, enter into the religion of Islam [*bi-l-dukḥūli fī dīni l-islām*]!”⁷¹

It is in his special access to his teacher’s private world, a world of the highest truth and piety in Christendom, that Islam is revealed to him as the apex of faith. After having reached “an amount of knowledge which I cannot reckon,” he asks only for the meaning of one single word, the name of the Paraclete. This single truth is so powerful it causes his infirm and elderly teacher to “weep” and would be powerful enough to cause the “Christian masses” to kill them both if it became known. It is a name spoken only in utter secrecy, only within the inner sanctum of Martello’s private house. Only one who mastered the Gospels and all Christian learning and then earned the keys to

Martello's private world by becoming the "closest of his retinue" could possess the authority to merit and the knowledge to understand the revelation of the Paraclete's true meaning. The ordering of recounted elements that leads the protagonist on this ascent thus draws a direct connection between the expertise and prodigious mastery of Christian knowledge of Anselm/'Abd Allāh, the unequalled authority of Martello, and the prophetic supremacy of Islam as the truth to be found at the heart of Christian belief.

This ordering of events within the narrative mirrors the order of the argument at work throughout the entire treatise. After pledging secrecy to his teacher, Anselm/'Abd Allāh claims he spent the next year slowly making his way to Tunisia via Mallorca and Sicily. After publicly professing his faith in Islam, he married and had a son, whom he named Muhammad. He then learned Arabic, obtained a post as a customs official, adopted the name 'Abd Allāh al-Turjumān, or 'Abd Allāh "the interpreter," and penned the *Gift of the Learned One*, where he tells this very story. Following his conversion account and a second section praising the Ḥafṣid ruler Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad, the remainder of the text is mainly dedicated to a lengthy attack on Christianity on the basis of the Gospels. Anselm/'Abd Allāh's offensive is based heavily on the sources of those whom he attacks, and he cites directly from the Gospels with much greater frequency than he cites the Qur'ān, although the language of his new faith permeates his discourse. By placing this attack after his conversion, Anselm/'Abd Allāh first establishes his authenticity as an expert in the teachings of his former religion and then applies the authority of that position to expose the falseness of Christian teachings and the secret truth of Islam at the core of Christian revelation. Just as in Abner/Alfonso's case, Anselm/'Abd Allāh proffers his narrative as an embodiment of the vision of history defended throughout the work by reason and proof text. In linking his education with his eventual conversion, Anselm/'Abd Allāh becomes a symbolic embodiment of the movement of history from Christianity toward Islam.

This conclusion is based on a reading of the book's present form, in which there seems to be a close connection between its opening conversion and the doctrinal arguments in the later sections. Before this connection can be accepted, however, it is necessary to address the problematic textual history of the *Gift* itself. Not only does no manuscript of the work survive from before the seventeenth century. Anselm/'Abd Allāh's authorship has also been called into question on the basis of numerous problems within the text, including changes in tone between the conversion drama in part 1 and part 3, changes in tone within part 3 itself, and numerous egregious imprecisions concerning Christian rites and beliefs that would be unthinkable for a

former Franciscan friar with Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s experience and education. Moreover, the editor, Mikel de Epalza, citing the exact coincidence of long passages with the Castilian anti-Christian oeuvre of the Morisco Aḥmad al-Ḥānafi, has speculated that the original written by Turmeda—perhaps now lost as such—was modified and expanded by a Morisco, possibly al-Ḥānafi himself, sometime around the end of the sixteenth or beginning of the seventeenth century. This theory is further supported by the occasional use of oral, Western dialectal Arabic, including elements particular to sixteenth-century Moriscos.⁷²

Such problems would seem to make it hard to defend any reading of the connections between the opening conversion scenes and the treatise itself. Against these doubts concerning the work’s internal structure, however, Robert Beier has offered evidence that the prologue, which defines the work as anti-Christian and describes all three parts of it, was written by Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh himself. Beier has shown that the prologue closely reproduces a passage of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (*Rasā’il ikhwān al-ṣafā*), a collection of teachings by an anonymous tenth-century group of religious scholars probably from Basra. This is the very same source used by Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh as a model for his *Dispute of the Ass* only a few years before the *Gift*.⁷³ This important coincidence further supports Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s authorship of part 1 of the *Gift*. Equally important, however, it also seems to link him directly to the *Gift*’s overall structure across its three parts and with its premise as described in the opening. Moreover, it heightens the impression of the work’s coherence given by other coincidences linking the first and third parts, most notably the conclusion of the third part with mention of the Paraclete as Muhammad, the very subject that is at the heart of Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s conversion in part 1. On this basis, the acerbic content of his *Gift* would seem to be of his own design, even if some of the specific points and language contained within the third section are Morisco additions or alterations. Most important for our purposes, the core of the *Gift*’s narrative of conversion can be linked directly to its anti-Christian objective.

By drawing parallels between his personal story and a more general polemical objective, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh follows directly in the path of Christian textual tradition of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a tradition with which he was no doubt familiar through his studies in Paris and Bologna. In the prologue, in which he explains his reasons for writing before beginning the story of his conversion, he explicitly states that in contrast to earlier anti-Christian writers who argued “following the method of Reason [*al-ma‘qūl*],” he will blend this with an argument based also on “tradition [*al-naql*].”⁷⁴ He thus

adapts the methodological divisions within Arabic branches of learning (reason and religious tradition, *ʿaql* and *naql*) to describe those already current among Christian authors between use of reason (*ratio*) and use of authority (*auctoritas*). Very similar to the hybrid approach of Abner/Alfonso in the *Teacher of Righteousness*, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s method constitutes a blend of philosophical proofs and exegetical appeals with personal testimony, all framed by his narrative of personal transformation.

The content of the polemic elaborates the implicit arguments of the opening frame. Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh specifically appeals to *auctoritas* as it developed after the twelfth century by using evidence considered authentic by Christians. He states that in order to refute their religious traditions and beliefs, he “will cite therefore their Gospels and those who wrote them and their laws and those who compiled them and the rottenness of their reasons and the negation of their blasphemies about their traditions and their calumnies about Jesus the Messiah and lies about God.”⁷⁵ Like Abner/Alfonso, he justifies this appeal to the *auctoritates* of his enemies by including the depiction of his transformation. He relates that just prior to his public conversion, the Ḥafṣid ruler sent for a number of visiting Christian soldiers and merchants and asked them if they knew “this new priest who arrived by boat.” They replied, “Sire, he is a very learned man in our religion and our priests have even said, truly, they have not seen one of higher authority in knowledge or faith in our religion.”⁷⁶ Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s work rests on the thorough knowledge of sources authoritative among his enemies, and his conversionary fiction serves to establish his authority concerning the very material he sets out to refute.

Just as in the case of earlier Christian examples of the late thirteenth century and early fourteenth, his legitimate authority not only derives from his prophetic experience of secret revelation, but also is based on his linguistic expertise. He not only boasts that he “learned [ḥafaẓtu] the Arabic language perfectly” in one year; he also claims that he served the Ḥafṣid ruler Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad as translator and interpreter of enemy correspondence during the Franco-Genoan attack on Mahdia in 1390.⁷⁷ In order to depict his linguistic ability as one of the foundations of his authenticity in conversion, he relates a scene in which Abū Fāris, the son of Abū al-ʿAbbās who became the Ḥafṣid ruler after his father’s death, intercepted a letter written to Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh by one of his former acquaintances, a Franciscan brother from Sicily, trying to convince him to return to Christianity. Without informing Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh that he already knew its contents, Abū Fāris tested his fidelity by asking him to translate the letter. When Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh finished his translation,

Abū Fāris exclaimed, “By God, he did not leave out [*mā taraka*] a single letter!,” thus directly connecting his fidelity in conversion with his linguistic skill in translation. In suggesting this association between translation and conversion, his work echoes that of his older contemporary, the Jewish doctor Moses ben Samuel of Roquemaure (better known as Juan de Avinon after professing Christianity in the 1350s), who introduced his Hebrew translation of Bernard de Gordon’s *Lilium medicinae* with a striking narrative of his own conversion to Christianity.⁷⁸

At the very end of the *Gift*, Anselm/‘Abd Allāh returns to a discussion of the Paraclete from the Gospel of John, “the cause of my conversion to Islam [*sababu islāmī*]” which he claims is a Greek word that can be translated into Arabic as “Aḥmad.” By connecting the name with the historical circumstances of his conversion under the Ḥafṣid ruler Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad, he both blends his first-person perspective with that of his real, authorial voice and draws a direct parallel between translation and conversion by connecting the “discovery” of the secret name of the Paraclete with his newfound faith.⁷⁹ In numerous similar passages, he presents himself as “the interpreter,” *al-Turjumān*, in both a literal and a spiritual sense. He translates Christian messages for Abū al-‘Abbās just as he converts his identity into that of a new believer and transforms the authoritative sources of Christian tradition into proof texts justifying Christianity’s prophetic abrogation by Islam. The power of Anselm/‘Abd Allāh to translate the old tradition and the old self into the new conflates translation and conversion into a single act of faith whose ultimate goal is victory over past errors.

Anselm/‘Abd Allāh’s *Gift* seems to follow the tack mapped out in our earlier reading of the conversion stories of Samaw’al al-Maghribī, Sa’id Ḥasan, and ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī, in which the account of conversion to Islam moves gradually from its position as an afterthought to its prominence as the opening frame of the entire discussion to follow. In contrast with ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s *Outstretched Sword*, however, the *Gift* not only highlights the prominence of the story at the beginning of the text, it also develops a more complex narrative structure and includes elaborate description and detail, and connects these elements more directly to the combative function of the work as a whole by making Anselm/‘Abd Allāh’s education and conversion the foundation of his ability to successfully refute Christian belief. In these connections between the plot details of his personal story and the doctrinal content, parts of the *Gift* also closely resemble the Christian texts examined in earlier chapters. This apparent affinity with Christian models is evident in the various issues we have already considered: the appeal to both reason and authoritative tradition, the

use of personal testimony to support the authority of the arguments, the carefully drawn parallels between personal experience and historical processes, and the appeal to linguistic mastery as a further proof of authenticity in conversion. In all of these and, most important, in the integration of the intricacies of the opening scene with the overall thrust of the work, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s text, despite being written in Arabic for Muslim readers, closely resembles Christian conversion narratives, above all that of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid.

This resemblance is not surprising. Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh the author was educated as a Christian, and archival documents confirm that he was already a Franciscan in 1376 and was ordained a deacon in 1379. His emphasis on his education as the necessary prelude to his conversion already frames his adoption of Islam in terms of Christian learning and practice, and he underscores this further by presenting a citation from the Gospels as the key to his transformation. Even more important, before writing the *Gift* in Arabic in 1420, he apparently wrote at least four works in Catalan, some or all *after* his conversion to Islam around 1387, the most important being his *Dispute of the Ass* (*Disputa de l’ase*, ca. 1417–18).⁸⁰ The fact of his dual literary output provides a clear context in which Christian models and forms could easily inform his Arabic treatise.

Because the opening story directly advances the polemical vision, the rhetoric of the *Gift*, like that of other, similar Christian texts, is affected by the ambiguities inherent in the narrative form. This is another way that Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s work is similar to contemporary Christian models: this sort of tension between form and content is endemic to the extended conversion stories in Christian manuscripts such as the *Little Work* of Judah/Herman and the *Teacher of Righteousness* of Abner/Alfonso. One issue at the heart of the ambiguity generated within Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s description is the patent duplicity of Nicolau Martello. When he reveals the true meaning of the Paraclete to Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh and implores him to convert to Islam, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh asks him why he has not heeded his own advice. He responds, “If God had guided me to this while I was still your age, I would have left everything and entered the True Religion.” Unfortunately, God revealed the truth of Islam to him only after he was old and feeble: “I would remain among the [Muslims] a poor old man, ninety years of age, where I do not understand their language and they do not know my worth.” And if the Christians found out his true faith, “the masses would kill [him].”⁸¹ Although Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh condemns him for this excuse and claims he is worthy of God’s punishment, he still accepts his teaching as true and follows his advice to convert.

Even more problematic, Martello explicitly orders Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh not to reveal his own secret: “If any of it were to become known, the masses would kill you instantly, and I would not be able to help you. Nor would it help you to trace this back to me, for I would deny it, and my word about you would be believed, but your statements against me would not be believed.”⁸² With this threat, Martello shows himself to be a liar who would not hesitate to send his young protégé to his death to save himself. His word, it seems, cannot be trusted, and the ease with which he threatens death contrasts sharply with his peremptory call to conversion. Not only is Martello lacking in enough resolution to stand behind his own advice, but he is exposed as a fraud, calling into question the reputability of his secret disclosure. If he admits that he would so easily lie about their interview, how can Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh be sure that he has not deceived him entirely in his exegetical revelation? On a textual level, the ambiguity surrounding Martello’s character is sufficient to cast a partial shadow of illegitimacy over Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s conversion, and even over the authority on which the rest of the treatise is founded.

Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh, moreover, seems himself complicit in this duplicity. When Martello orders him never to tell of their discussion, he pledges secrecy before God. Nevertheless, as a full disclosure of their conversation and Martello’s name and location, the *Gift* itself stands as a blatant betrayal of that promise. He again calls his own credibility into doubt in his later deception of the above-mentioned Sicilian friar and merchants. After correctly translating the letter from the friar for the Ḥafṣid ruler Abū Fāris, the latter proposed that Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh pretend to be willing to forsake his conversion, on the conditions that the merchants with whom he was traveling sell their goods for a low price. Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh agreed to undertake the trick, and after the sale was complete, he reneged on his promise to return to Christianity, and the friar and merchants, having forfeited their profits, were forced to leave without him.⁸³ By showing that he can so easily offer false testimony against his former coreligionists, he exposes himself as a clever but untrustworthy opportunist. Within the confines of the story, this suggests he may also be an unreliable narrator whose presentation of the facts—including those of his conversion and faith—must be carefully scrutinized by the reader. While his betrayal and critical presentation of Martello are naturally part of the polemical form in which he writes, they take on an added significance in the context of the opening scene. By casting into doubt his own character and that of his teacher—the cause of his conversion—he also unsettles the easy movement from Christian faith to Islam. As the private story is to symbolize the larger trajectory of prophetic history, these doubts work against the very message of abrogation

defended at length throughout the text. Because this story directly informs and supports the arguments that follow it, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s identity as an unreliable narrator begins to overshadow his credibility as a witness against his former faith and as an apologist for Islam.

Curiously, this narrative ambiguity within the *Gift* is mirrored by the uncertainty manifest beyond it in the paradox of Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s multilingual authorship. Not only did he continue to write in Catalan after his conversion, seemingly directing his discussion to a Christian, Catalan readership, but the content of all of his Catalan writing seems in no way explicitly determined by his new identity as a Muslim living in North Africa, and he makes no mention in his Arabic text of any of his earlier Catalan ideas or their content. Apart from a few details about his location and Arabic name, he says nothing about his identity or conversion in any of his Catalan works.⁸⁴ Even more significant, his Catalan corpus seems in some places to reflect a decidedly Christian perspective, citing the Gospels approvingly and even advising belief in the Trinity and the Catholic Church.⁸⁵ Because all of Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s apparently Christian statements come from compositions finished *after* his conversion to Islam—works that, in numerous cases, were based directly on Arabic models—critics have sought to attribute his conversion to opportunism, philosophical indifference, or material desires rather than sincere faith.⁸⁶ Despite his claim in the *Gift* to have learned Arabic “perfectly” at least a decade before the dates given to his first Catalan works, and despite his claim even in his earlier texts of similar linguistic skill in both Arabic and Hebrew,⁸⁷ the composition of all of his earlier books in Catalan for Christian readers sets the Arabic *Gift* apart from the rest of his writing and raises the question of how these seemingly disparate bodies of work can be integrated. Given that in the *Gift* he condemns the Christian concept of the Trinity and criticizes all four Gospels as mendacious, the most logical conclusion is to see either a deliberate doubling of his authorial personality or a deliberate fictionalization of his voice in one or both groups of texts.⁸⁸

Similar to the authorial presence surrounding some contemporary Christian representations of conversion, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s authorship and authority are premised on an inherent duality as the work of both convert and apostate, both author and translator, both Anselm and ʿAbd Allāh. Like his Christian contemporaries, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh seems to rely on a dialectical appeal to his former self and his original language as a foundation of the authenticity and authority of his present authorial voice. In a significant parallel with Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s identity as a convert—understood as both the fictional character of his conversion

narratives and as the real author who produced them—depends on the defining opposition of his former self as a witness to his new identity. In his Catalan *Dispute of the Ass*, now surviving only in a sixteenth-century French translation, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh himself alludes to the explosive potential of this dialectical opposition between old and new selves to escape the control of the author who depicts them. In the debate narrated in the text between the character Anselm and a talking ass about why humans are nobler than animals, Anselm argues that, unlike animals, each human being is unique. This is a blessing from God, he says, because if this were not so, “the Jew would not be distinguished from the Christian, nor the Muslim from the Jew, and both could mix with the Christians. Infinite other evils would follow... and the whole world would be lost.”⁸⁹ Yet in the *Gift*, Muslim and Christian do in fact mix in creating the sense of his converted authorial identity, and the circularity of his presentation seems to undermine his monomaniacal defense of Islam above all other faiths. Curiously, in the *Dispute*, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh seems to express through his character’s remarks that the logic of abrogation inherent in conversion narratives and indeed in polemical writing itself is essentially dialectical, preserving its antithetical content within the synthesis and thus condemning its “true self” to depend perpetually on the very thing whose negation is the premise of its existence.

Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh clearly patterned his conversion to Islam at least in part on Islamic models such as that of Ibn Ishāq. He explicitly mentions the story of the Jewish convert and companion of the prophet ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām—a paradigmatic story of conversion to Islam told in Ibn Ishāq’s *Life of Muhammad (Sīrat Rasūl Allāh)*—within his conversion account in the *Gift*.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, by framing his treatise with this dialectical picture of his conversion, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh casts his theme in a story form that seems as Christian as it is Muslim. Beyond its appeal to reason and authority, its use of testimony as a vehicle of authority, and its appeal to linguistic mastery, the principal argument of the *Gift* similarly faces, like the Christian models it resembles, the ambiguity resulting from the polysemy of its narrative form.

In at least one critical respect, however, Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh’s narrative follows the model of earlier Islamic examples: in its vision of history. Despite the intricacies of plot and representation, he clearly states that his overall message is the *refutation* of Christianity and the abrogation of all earlier corruptions in prophetic tradition. As Martello explains, “If the Christians had persisted in the original religion of Jesus, they would indeed belong to the religion of God.” By contrast, Islam—as Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh explains in the preface that precedes his conversion narrative, in a phrase given in nearly identical form in the

opening to the *Outstretched Sword* of ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī—is “the truly founded religion [*al-dīn al-qawīm*],” the religion that “abrogates all other religions [*al-nāsikh...kull al-adyāni*].”⁹¹ Because Judaism and Christianity are considered less as prefigurations of the final revelation of Islam than as deviations from true prophecy, the erroneous past that they symbolize has less value in legitimizing the Islamic present than the Jewish past does for Christian converts like Moses/Petrus and Abner/Alfonso. Correspondingly, Anselm/‘Abd Allāh’s preconversion self, despite the dialectical circularity created by the emplotment of the narrative, is hardly called upon in the text to testify to his new faith or to legitimize his final understanding of Islam. As he affirms in the preface even before he narrates his experience, God simply “put [him] in the community of Muhammad” and “granted guidance to the straight path.” Even though the Gospels are said to prophesy the future coming of Muhammad by naming the Paraclete, this fact is the product of Martello’s revelation of the cryptic text’s true meaning rather than an interpretation added onto its literal sense. Anselm/‘Abd Allāh’s conversion story, similar to most cases examined in this book, dramatizes the general notion of prophetic history shared by its intended readers. In this particular Muslim vision of history, the final triumph of Islam is to cancel all that came before. By casting Judaism and Christianity as falsifications of true Scripture rather than as limited revelations whose meaning was expanded by Islam, the work could and did communicate its overall polemical points apart from the contradictions and ambiguity wrought by its narrative frame.

In this critical respect, Anselm/‘Abd Allāh’s *Gift*, despite its many similarities with Christian stories, still shares the greatest affinity with other Muslim anti-Christian treatises, even those many examples, not considered in this study, without conversion scenes. All of the examples considered in this chapter, including the *Gift*, do in fact dramatize—contrary to Morrison’s claim about conversion to Islam—a general plot of soteriological history, just as the Christian sources do. This is not surprising, given that, as Tijana Krstic argues, “the Muslim autobiographical narrative of conversion developed as a genre intimately related to Muslim polemical literature.”⁹² At the same time, it should also not come as a surprise that the dramatic complexities of that narrative emplotment—harbingers of future victory, memories of former error, doubts over the truth, conflict between inner and outer voices or past and present selves—symbolize a very different theology of history from that represented in the Christian texts examined in previous chapters. The Islamic topology of time and salvation reflected in these sources, like the image of conversion, is not figural but chronological. It relates to the past through a teleological notion of history premised not, or not only, on dialectic but on true prophecy

and abrogation. Because Islam is “the religion that abrogates all other religions,” conversion to Islam is not characterized as an ironic inversion of what was before taken as the true faith but as the canceling of all previous faiths through the final removal of error and corruption and the final clarification of its true meaning. As Samaw’al explains succinctly in his letter of riposte to a critic of his conversion text, “Truth is one and not plural.... [P]roof led me to the true faith, then from its truth followed the falseness of all opposing faiths.”⁹³

Conclusion

Polemic as Narrative

The consul...looked upon us Jews not as creatures of flesh and blood but as purely literary heroes who had stepped out of the pages of the Old Testament and would step back into those of the New at the Last Judgment, and who meanwhile must be kept from entering another story by mistake.

—A. B. YEHOSHUA, *Mr. Mani*

There was once a queen who ruled a strange and distant island. She was a good and just queen but had not heard of any world religion. Her people, while upright by nature, lived without laws. One night, as she lay awake in her bed thinking with confusion on the true path, as she often tried to do, she was resolved to call together her wisest men. The next morning, after relating her concerns to a group of the advisors of her court, one wise man proposed sending out emissaries to look for the true religion, and so three of the best men, Salman, ‘Eqer, and Ahitub, were sent on the journey. Salman found himself in Muslim lands and converted to Islam. ‘Eqer ended up in Constantinople and converted to Christianity. Ahitub came to know a wise old prophet who taught him the ways of the Jews, eventually leading to his conversion to Judaism. Seven years later, all three returned to their island, each as a messenger of one of the three Abrahamic religions. When Ahitub the Jew and ‘Eqer the Christian began to argue about their differences, the queen authorized a debate between them to determine the true religion, and for two days each put forth arguments concerning the Incarnation, the Messiah, the Virgin Birth, the Trinity, and other issues of Jewish-Christian disputation. When Salman the Muslim intervened to support the case of Ahitub, he and all the others on the island finally professed the truth of Ahitub’s religion and converted to Judaism, while the Christian ‘Eqer refused conversion and hanged himself in disgrace. Ahitub then spent many days teaching the queen many details about the Jewish faith.

Such is the story told in the fifteenth-century Hebrew allegory

known as the *Book of Ahitub and Salman* (*Sefer Aḥitub ve-Ṣalmon*). The text, of uncertain authorship but attributed to one Mattitياهو, was written sometime in the first half of the century in Iberia, possibly in the 1420s in the wake of the Jewish-Christian debate that took place at Tortosa in 1413–14.¹ It was at about this time or shortly after that Solomon Halevi/Pablo de Santa María wrote his dedicatory epistle to the *Additions* and his anti-Jewish *Scrutiny of Scripture* and that Anselm/ʿAbd Allāh wrote his *Gift* against Christianity. While the arguments of *Ahitub and Salman*, like those of many of the works considered in this book, are common and even at times formulaic, its narrative elaboration is not. What is most innovative is not the framing of arguments within a tale of conversion, for by the early fifteenth century there were many precedents of this kind to draw from. What stands out most in this presentation is its full commitment to fiction and the abandonment of a pretense of real history as the background of the tale. The protagonist, Ahitub, is no longer a representation of the alleged author. Rather, he has become a fictional hero.

The step from confessional self to fictional hero in polemical writing is a small one to take. After all, the convert figure himself, as he emerges in the frame texts we have looked at in this study, already possesses many characteristics of the archetypal hero of myth.² His story is initiated, implicitly or explicitly, by a call away from his community to a journey of spiritual dimensions. Although his spiritual progress is often allegorized through a physical journey, his heroism is one of character rather than action, and his movement is spiritual and psychological rather than physical. Such a journey naturally leads him to a liminal space where his old value structures and beliefs no longer apply, and his transformation often entails a break with his father or teacher. In facing this breakdown of old paradigms, he must undertake a struggle in which his emotional fortitude and spiritual resolve are tested. He is often a twin or a double, and, like Jacob at the Jabbok, he must separate himself from and struggle against his darker avatar, his preconversion self. His final abandonment of the old self and declaration of the new mark the unexpected reversal of fortunes—the dramatic peripety—that is a key component of much narrative drama. The heroic return that follows his trials is double: it is both a return to his new community as a neophyte and a return to his old community as a prophetic revealer of error. This double return is paralleled in the double function of his text as both apology and polemic. Through his struggle, he constitutes a crossroads of physical, social, and spiritual worlds, a shamanic locus of prophecy and revelation. He is an embodiment of the cultural values of his reader, and his story, however brief, offers a statement of shared identity about a common

historical past and spiritual future.

His tragic flaw—for all heroes must have a tragic flaw that threatens their heroic endeavors with possible failure—is, like a limp that marks his gait, the ineluctable presence of his former self, the self whose story must be retold in order to be controlled. One could easily interpret the recurrence of this doppelgänger through compulsive retelling in psychoanalytic terms as a classic return of the repressed, a failed attempt to fully sublimate the convert's own doubt and irresolution. Even doing without such terminology, the lability of the convert's identity, always haunting the converted self with the threat of backsliding and apostasy, is constitutive of his authenticity at the same time as it is threatening to his integrity.³ The convert's profession of faith, because it is inevitably directed against the foil of his rejected former self, is ever incomplete because it is haunted by the persistence of this dialectical antithesis. In narrative terms, the apex of the hero's triumph is also a Sisyphean condemnation to repeat his story in perpetuity.

In Ahitub's case, he is called to seek truth alongside his darker doubles, 'Eger and Salman. His journey off the island is both a physical and a mystical journey in which he meets a wise figure who reveals the truth to him. In his discussion with the old prophet, he does not assent immediately but struggles to meet his challenges and questions. His return to the island brings knowledge of a new truth back to his community, and he must struggle against and triumph over his nemesis 'Eger before his victory is complete. His debate with 'Eger dramatizes the common struggle that fifteenth-century Jews faced in Iberia's Christian kingdoms. The journey of his conversion that persuades the whole island to follow him is an allegory of the sense of common destiny of those who remain faithful to God's covenant with the Jews, a sense embodied in his Hebrew readership.

This way of seeing the *Book of Ahitub and Salman*, and with it all of the examples discussed in this book, rests on the premise that stories about conversion make most sense when viewed *as stories* rather than as embellished but factual descriptions of historical events, actions, or experiences. In the case of the *Book of Ahitub*, it is obvious that the convert is primarily a fictitious character, but such a narrative structure is no less definitive in the stories of Moses/Petrus Alfonsi, Abner/Alfonso, or Anselm/'Abd Allāh. Conversion, as it is conceived in the sources examined here, signifies a dramatically emplotted trajectory that cannot be separated from a shared notion of the history of the faithful. In Christian works in particular, such a declaration of faith and difference involves both a change of individual will and a demarcation of social boundaries. In such emplotments, in Paul Ricoeur's formulation, "individual and community are constituted in

their identity by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history.”⁴ In its double sense as an expression of both faith and infidelity, the representation of individual conversion thus deliberately mirrors historical change. It does not merely pronounce allegiance or denounce difference, but sketches the relation between the two according to a temporal model of the evolution of individual and communal identity. Part of the aptness of the image of conversion as a mirror of history, and also its richness as a literary trope, is its positioning on the cusp of both memory and expectation, or, in Robert Alter’s words, “in the shifting aperture between the shadowy foreimage in the anticipating mind of the observer and the realized revelatory image in the work itself.”⁵ For this reason, narrative not only provides a felicitous rhetorical tool for its analysis; it also constitutes an essential means of its expression.

By using close readings to trace out the contours of the narrative core at the heart of polemical texts about conversion, I have also adumbrated a more general point about medieval polemical writing. Conversion stories function appositely to represent interconfessional arguments because those arguments themselves, even without conversion stories, are built on a primitive narrative structure. Because belief and identity in the Abrahamic religions of the Mediterranean are defined by their fundamentally historical character—whatever their theologies of the nature, action, attributes, or temporal realm of the divinity, they all center equally on a concrete history and a finite temporal matrix—so dispute between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is itself founded on the conflict of rival conceptions of prophetic and soteriological history.⁶ When writers in each faith articulate the details of their disbelief in other faiths, such articulations must inevitably appeal to a temporal framework in which a core historical narrative (or set of narratives) is affirmed in lieu of different narratives. As Tamim Ansary has so elegantly put it in his description of Islamic myths of history, in religious conflict between the Abrahamic religions, “each side identifies the other as a character in its own narrative.”⁷ A Muslim claim that Muhammad is the seal of the prophets implies also that Moses and Jesus were not the last or most important prophets in the tradition of Abrahamic prophecy. A Jewish claim that the Messiah was still to come is a rejection of the Christian belief in Jesus as that Messiah, and Jewish faith in the sanctity of the Torah is an implicit rejection of the Muslim accusation of the falsification of Scripture.⁸ A Christian claim that Jesus was prefigured in Adam is an implicit claim that God’s covenant with the Jews was finite in duration and would be superseded. An affirmation of the core mythology of one is an implicit rejection of other, rival historical models, and a representation of the movement between such

paradigms is likewise both a profession of faith and a repudiation of difference according to an exclusive historical model. Conversion stories function as a sort of shorthand of belief, summing up an entire theology of history in a single symbolic gesture of faith.⁹

In other words, the theological contests between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in the Middle Ages, insofar as they are expressed in polemical writing, were primarily contests between rival fictions of sacred history and were thus framed, either explicitly or implicitly, within the terms of a temporal relationship. The temporality of such writing in particular is based, moreover, on an implied relation between past and future, an archaeology and an eschatology, and this relation is given voice in many of the texts examined here through the structures of flashback and foreshadowing. As Paula Fredriksen explains, "Any traditional religion which sees its origins in a discrete historical revelation will hold consonance with the past to be the ultimate criterion of legitimacy. Put differently, the present is legitimate only to the degree that it rearticulates and reaffirms the past."¹⁰ I can thus suggest that what I have shown to be the case for the examples presented here can also serve to describe medieval disputes more generally. The organization of inter-Abrahamic polemics into a temporal matrix through a present-tense story of the past or the future makes the nature of the self-articulation in those texts a temporally organized series of victories and defeats. In this way, all such apologies rest on an inherently narrative logic. The conversion accounts I have examined, especially in the Christian sources, all sweeten the insipid and repetitive doctrine of polemic not only by telling a good story, by augmenting pleasure in good Augustinian style through a delay in resolution and through the heightened release that comes with an unexpected reversal of expectations. They also do so by dramatizing the temporal matrix on which the dichotomous rhetoric of inter-Abrahamic controversy depends and by harmonizing the parallel drama of individual conversion and collective allegories of abrogation or messianic eschatology.

In the case of Christian anti-Judaism, that temporality is expressed in the dialectic of abrogation in which Judaism is rendered obsolete but still cannot be discarded within Christian history. In the case of Islamic anti-Jewish or anti-Christian writing, the narrative logic embodies an even broader abrogating temporality in which Islam is sealed historically as the final prophecy, a final clarification of a previously given but subsequently corrupted message. Jewish argument, even though it does not evoke an essential temporality of abrogation, does occasionally invoke an eschatological vision of history in which Jews will be returned to their original prominence as

God's chosen people after the various worldly kingdoms of the Gentiles have fallen. Based on a teleological exegesis of the dream in [chapter 7](#) of the book of Daniel, the four beasts symbolize four great kingdoms that will be defeated, Persia, Media, Greece, and Edom, the last understood variously as Roman Christendom or Islam. In all of these scenarios, polemic itself, like the conversion tales that often mirror it, is temporalized through a narrative model of history that dramatizes the trajectory from infidelity to faith. Based on the sources examined here, we can suggest that each faith tradition understands conversion as a miniature reenactment of some aspect of its primary historical emplotment, although not always an aspect of the same critical importance.

Because the representation of conversion and apostasy was similarly a representation of models of prophetic history writ large, the theological function of narrative was, as we have seen, very different in each tradition. In the Christian examples we have considered, the vision of history at work in each of the accounts was one of a web of historical time in which past and future are bound together like the elements of a diachronic narrative. What is part and parcel of Christian supersessionist ideas is also what connects these ideas to narrative. The most common exegetical understanding of Christian history dictates that Christian truth cannot be affirmed solely in opposition to its past but is also in dialectical counterpoint to it. This spiraling image of historical revelation—returning constantly to the past as the ever-present precondition of one's own belief rather than simply leaving it behind in the realm of the false and erroneous—requires repetition and reenactment of the rhetoric of apology, a need met by narrative recycling in Christian concepts of history. This productive relationship between past and present is easily mapped onto a textual matrix of context, event, and conclusion or conflict, crisis, and resolution. As a result, the dramatic development of a convert's movement from darkness to light can be directly interwoven with a larger message of the fulfillment of Judaism by Christianity.¹¹

In contrast to this, narration plays a very different role in the articulation of Jewish and Muslim visions of history within medieval writing. For obvious reasons, Judaism never positions itself in a relation of temporal inheritance *vis-à-vis* Christianity or Islam, and thus the representation of conversion and the trajectory it implies does not play the same role as it does in Christianity. While rabbinical and medieval Jewish sources, similar to Christian texts, do characterize time in figural terms, that figuralism is almost never dialectical; it rarely contains within it a notion of the fulfillment of the past but instead serves the function of commemoration of the past and the preservation of memory. In this worldview, Christianity and Islam

play no *essential* role. While they might serve to symbolize the infidelity and idolatry that mark the movement of history toward the final redemption of the righteous and faithful and the end of exile, the depiction of conversion to Judaism from Christianity or Islam is no more theologically meaningful than that of conversion from any other faith or lack of faith. Fictions of conversion to Judaism affirm the same theological message against all rival faiths, that of faith in God and performance of the commandments.

Islamic argument, by contrast, because it is premised on a model of progressive historical supersession, would seem to present a paradigm more akin to Christian models than Jewish ones. The core paradigm of Islamic history in these texts involves the abrogation of earlier religions and the correction of earlier Scriptures that had falsified the core revelation transmitted by all the prophets. As a result, the stories of conversion to Islam considered here do epitomize the basic movement of history from idolatry and error to true religion and the closure of prophecy. There is, however, one fundamental respect in which these Islamic concepts of abrogation differ from Christian ideas: Islam presents itself as a final *correction* and *clarification* of God's repeated and unchanging revelation rather than a new interpretation of it. Because there is not a mutual relation between past and present revelation—the erroneous hermeneutics of the pre-Islamic past are not themselves invoked often to validate the ongoing legitimacy of Islam—so the pre convert self has a limited role in the story of the final submission to the true religion. While conversion to Islam did function to mirror Islam's historical abrogation of Christianity and Judaism, the breakthrough of the convert is presented as a disclosure of the true meaning of revelation and Scripture rather than the addition of a secret spiritual meaning onto Scripture's literal, carnal sense.¹² The Islamic examples examined here, for the most part, simply break with the past rather than plumb the depths of past errors in an attempt to determine what they might portend.

These different conceptions of history, which translate into different narrative representations, also explain a more fundamental difference that separates Christian conversion stories from Jewish and Muslim examples. The use of narrative to dramatize larger structures of salvation history—grafting Scriptural archaeologies and eschatologies onto the temporal span of storytelling—exposes that history to the irreducible openness of meaning that is inherent in narrative representation itself. The more persistent engagement with fictional structures in Christian works seems to subject their message to a fundamental and ongoing uncertainty about the relation between past and present, and yet it is precisely that temporal relation that

such works are aiming to address. In other words, the narrative structure, which is more innate and essential in the Christian sources we have examined, also proves to be a kind of logical drag on the wider theological agenda pursued by their authors.¹³ The inherent multivalence of textual representation is continually at odds with the reductive axiomatic imperative of polemical argument.

At the same time, figural narrative and supersessionist theology have been fundamental to dramatizations of history in Christian thought since its very inception in a way that, as I have argued, is largely absent from the Jewish and Muslim sources presented here. The foundational text of Christian conversion, the Acts of the Apostles, is also a foundational model of a Christian vision of history, and it incorporates the mixed and even opposed images of conversion already evident in the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles. The Augustinian paradigm of conversion, as we saw in [Chapter 1](#), was at the same time a paradigm of history and of exegesis. Its profound importance in subsequent Christian tradition was due in no small measure to its ability to sublimate the tensions within the foundational texts of Christian belief by putting them to productive theological use. Even with the Augustinian synthesis, however, the narrative ambiguity built into Christian tradition naturally has given way in Christian thought to an imperative of retelling, of the *repetition* of the fundamental typological dramas of history. The foundational myth of the Christian replacement of Judaism, because of its narrative form and dialectical structure, lives in its repetitions.

Ironically, this repetitiveness is itself a source of ambiguity in polemical discourse. This is not a mere tautology but a central issue of all medieval writing about conversion: the balance between form and content, variance and recognizability. Taken as individual expressions of faith, conversion narratives lay claim to a uniqueness that can be preserved only through the details of an individual's story. At the same time, as expressions of shared trajectories of history and salvation, they rely utterly on their conventional familiarity. Geoffrey Harpham has identified this as a conundrum of all Christian discussions of conversion in which faith must be both conventional and *sui generis*, premised both on the uniqueness of individual faith and the imitation of a shared and familiar model: "Oddly enough, the act of conversion, requiring as it does an assent to imitation, contains a resistance to conversion, so that the term designates not only a principle of radical change in life, but also a principle of recalcitrance and unchangeability. As a turn to 'authenticity,' conversion remains earthbound, containing its own 'error.'...Structurally self-inhibited, conversion assents to its own temptation."¹⁴ The tension between the reading of conversion accounts as either individual stories or shared

histories is also a tension between uniqueness and exemplarity, between singular authenticity and perpetual repeatability. This tension is, more broadly, one between past events and present understanding. It is deeply ironic that the narration of conversion, or of salvation history more generally—insofar as these are seen as continuing processes rather than discrete events—relies necessarily on a perspective outside of that history, a simultaneous identification and rupture between the narrator and the narrated, the author and the character.¹⁵

Part of this ambiguity may be attributed to what Caroline Walker Bynum has identified as the tension between competing notions of change that began to manifest themselves in the twelfth century. Metamorphosis, or “replacement-change,” evokes a process of the total replacement of one thing by another, and emerged in opposition to the notion of the hybrid, in which things are combined with other things without losing their original essences. Throughout the Middle Ages, conversion was naturally imagined as a kind of metamorphosis of the old self into the new and thus was naturally cast in a narrative form. At the same time, however, Christian conversion stories, because they worked to evoke a coupling of the old and the new in a kind of dialectical syzygy, simultaneously came to characterize conversion as a source of hybridity. In contrast to a depiction of conversion in which the convert has “stripped off the old self with its practices and [has] clothed [itself] with the new self,” the hybrid combines both into a new, mixed identity. While a conception of conversion as metamorphosis establishes the relation between the old and the new in a clear order within the process of change, the hybrid notion implicit within Christian supersessionist theology and the Augustinian doctrine of Jewish witness calls the finality of that linear transformation into question through the uncertainty of dialogue. Thus, as Bynum explains, “the one plus one that we find together in the hybrid must be in conversation with each other; each is a comment on the other.”¹⁶ The dialogical simultaneity implicit in the notion of a convert as hybrid pulls against the linear sequentiality of conversion imagined as a process of certain and definitive change. What is told as a single story must be retold and repeated as an enduring myth if the converted self is to be maintained as the definitive end point of conversion’s process of transformation. As Dante has shown us, the ascent to Paradise must always begin, and can only make sense, with an initial descent into the center of Inferno.

Yet within the ambiguity created by this narrative circularity of telling and telling again, past history can never quite be brought to connect fully with present faith, even though the present can have no foundation or justification without historical memorialization.

Structured as a dialectic that is premised on an exegetical logic, Christian narration seems structurally bound to repetition and in itself leads primarily to more narration and more commentary. Ultimately, because of this circular tension between completed history and its ongoing fulfillment, the convert of Christian polemical narratives of conversion is caught between a double gesture of affirming and rejecting his past. Despite its narrative, this articulated Christian self seems ineluctably bound to these cycles of temporality in which history is both condemned to the past and at the same time must be reenacted and reinscribed in order to be fulfilled. Although Christian myths of history, like those in Judaism and Islam, are invigorated in their repetitions, they must, unlike these, constantly struggle to contain the uncertainty inherent within their particular open-ended figuralism.



Storytellers do not convert their listeners.

—JAMES CARSE, *Finite and Infinite Games*

The story I have told in this book is partly about the intractability of narration as a tool for axiomatic argumentation, an intractability that proved more determinant in the Christian sources considered here than in the Jewish and Muslim texts.¹⁷ I have argued that Christian narratives of history came to be stabilized in the paradoxical formulations of Augustine and that in the Middle Ages the loss of that stasis was largely the product of an increased tension between reason and authority, proof and appeal. In following the contours of these premodern paradigms and tensions as they evolved, we have also seen, as was expected, how deeply Christian the story of these medieval fictions is and how imperfectly the idea of conversion can be applied beyond the parameters of Christian historical thought. The Jewish and Muslim examples I have considered have served above all to highlight the particularities of the Christian case, and I have barely begun to plumb the depth and complexity of Jewish and Muslim apologetic sources. There is a vast amount of work that remains to be done in exploring the many untapped riches of medieval Islamic hagiographic and theological writing and the documents waiting to be discovered in the Cairo Genizah. Based on the conclusions of this

book, we can be certain that future comparative studies of such material will be most useful and most far-reaching to the extent that they can differentiate between the various paradigms of religious change and pay attention to the particular worldview of the traditions that produced them. While limitations of space and scope have prevented me from attempting a more exhaustive treatment of non-Christian representations of religious change, one of my goals in this book has been to suggest how a comparison of such stories from different traditions might begin.

The attempts by medieval Christian writers to recapture that elusive and paradoxical Augustinian synthesis through narratives of self and of identity had deep and lasting effects well into the modern period and far beyond the limited pale of Christian belief. Early modern stories of found faith and renewed piety that have shaped modern religion and history—those of Ignatius of Loyola, John Calvin, and above all Martin Luther—derive their deep structures from a tradition traceable ultimately to the Augustinian paradigm of conversion through grace. Similarly, modern stories of found individuality and authorial voice—from Montaigne to Descartes, Pascal, and Rousseau—all build in some way on an Augustinian conception of selfhood as a text to be explained. At the same time, the many histories of forced conversion and confession in the early modern period, such as those arising from the Spanish Inquisition or the conquest of the Americas, point to the irresolvable tension in the Augustinian legacy between religious identity as an expression of inner faith and as an outer manifestation of hierarchies of authority.

Despite this tension, the early modern waxing of an Augustinian doctrine of grace, premised on interwoven notions of authenticity and radical interiority, became in modified and disguised form one of the constitutive strands of the Western constructs of autonomy and individual identity. This doctrine's paradoxical view of the past might even be said to account partially for the postmedieval reflection on the nature of secularism and the rise of modernity, insofar as these are defined through a teleological narrative that posits modernism as both the antithesis of and fulfillment of premodern history. Long before the modern reprising of these familiar ideas, however, the Augustinian model of religious change, which treated history, text, and self together, coexisted alongside the distinct paradigms of the other Abrahamic religions. In this uneasy and fluctuating coexistence, each tradition expressed its rival mythology of history and salvation through the narratives of individual believers, both real and imagined.

ABBREVIATIONS

Biblia Latina, cum postillis Nicolai de Lyra

Babylonian Talmud

~~Confessiones~~ Confessiones of Hippo, *Confessions*, ed. James J. O'Donnell

~~Confusio~~ Andrés, *Confusión o confutación de la secta Mahomética y del Alcorán*

CCM Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis

CSL Christianorum Series Latina

CSFL Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum

CT *Conversion and Text*, ed. Karl Morrison

~~Diálogo~~ Alfonsi, *Diálogo contra los Judíos*

~~Diálogo~~ Alfonsi, *Dialogue against the Jews*

~~Iḥwān~~ al-Maghribī, *Iḥwān al-yahūd: Silencing the Jews*

MGH Monumenta Germaniae Historica

~~Mostrador~~ of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid, Ms. "Espagnol 43," Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, fols. 12r-342v. Edited as *Mostrador de Justicia*, ed. Walter Mettmann

~~Obadiah~~ Golb, "The Autograph Memoirs of Obadiah the Proselyte"

Opusculum de conversione sua, ed. Gerlinde Niemeyer

Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Latina

Ramon Martí, *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Iudaeos*. Bibliothèque Saint-Geneviève Ms. 1405. References give folios from Ms. 1405 followed by corresponding pages from the Leipzig edition when present (e.g. "PF, 2v/Cf. 2").

~~Self~~ Reynolds, ed., *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*

~~Selected~~ Works of Ramon Llull, ed. Anthony Bonner

~~Tuhfa~~ Turmeda/'Abd Allāh al-Turjumān, *Fray Anselm Turmeda* ('Abdallāh al-Tarṣūmān) *y su polémica islamo-cristiana. Edición, traducción y estudio de la Tuhfa*, ed. and trans. Mikl̄ de Epalza

MS 2440 ("De Rossi 533"), Biblioteca Palatina, Parma. Jonathan Hecht, "The Polemical Exchange between Isaac Pollegar and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid according to Parma MS 2440 Iggeret Teshuvat Apikoros and Teshuvot la-Mēharef"

~~Abner~~ of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid, Ms. "Lat. 6423", Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome. *Tēšuvot la-Mēharef: Spanische Fassung*, ed. Walter Mettmann

Ramon Llull, *Vita Coetanea*, in *Opera Latina VIII (178–89)*

Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. Garry Wills

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Baer, *A History*, 1:329.
2. Prince, "Surveying Narratology," 3; Abbott, *Cambridge Introduction*, 19, emphasis in original. In Genette's terminology, I am focusing not on the *histoire* (translated as *story*, "what really happened") but rather on the *récit* (*narrative*, i.e., the representation of true or fictive events) and, to a lesser extent, the *narration* (*narration*, the act of turning the *histoire* into a *récit*) (*Narrative*, 26–27).
3. Alter, *Art*, 11. Cf. Onega and García Landa, introduction, 3.
4. Arnobius, *Arnobii*, 34.
5. This summary is taken from Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, 15–16.
6. On this section's title, see *Conversion*, 39.
7. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*, 33–34.
8. Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, C 220 12v-13r (citation from 12v):

Expositum suppliciter extitit coram nobis pro parte Sibilie pauperis et miserabilis persone uxore Bernardi Nathalis quod... accidit quod dictus Bernardus faciendo viagium versus partes Bugie et Barbarie diabolico ductus spiritu abnegando nomen domini sectam Mahometicam proelegit postea pater dicti Bernardi sciens hoc accedens versus dictas partes invento dicto eius filio... secum duxit ad civitatem Dertuse et eum tradidit Episcopo Dertuse qui dictum Bernardum correxit et reconciliavit et pro delicto penitentiam tribuit quodque mortuo patre dicti Bernardi procurator fiscalis seu vos quantitatem peccunie ascendentem summam...pertinentem dicto Bernardo ratione successionis... penes vos recepistis asserendo tam dictam quantitatem quam alia bona dicti Bernardi ratione criminis supradicti nostre curie pertinere unde cum asseratur quod dictus Bernardus derelicta uxore sua cum multitudine librorum sine aliqua provisione in remotis partibus degat. Et propterea fuerit pro parte dicte Sibilie nobis humiliter supplicatum ut intuitu elemosine et pietatis pro nutriendo et educando...eius filios dignemur dictam quantitatem ei facere liberari.

See Nirenberg, *Communities*, 128 n. 4. I am grateful to Dr. Nirenberg for sharing his transcription (which I have altered here) and to Abigail Krasner Balbale for helping me get a copy of it.

9. Within the rubrics introducing the poems beginning with 555, we are introduced to "Garci Ferrandes de Jerena who because of his sins and his great

misfortune fell in love with a jongleuresse [*una juglara*] who had been a moor. Thinking that she had great treasure and also because she was good-looking [vistosa], he asked for her as his wife from the king" (Juan Alfonso de Baena, *Cancionero*, 3:1117). In a later rubric, we read, "He went to Granada with his wife and children and turned Muslim [*se tornó moro*] and denied [*rrenegó*] the faith of Jesus Christ and said many bad things against it" (3:1130). The conversion and migration of singers were not uncommon. In the fourteenth-century *Routes toward Insight into Capital Empires* (*Masālik al-Abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*) of Ibn Faḍlallāh al-ʿUmārī, the conversion of various Maghribī or Andalūsī musicians is mentioned, including that of one Ḥiṣn [sic] bin ʿAbd bin Zayyah, who seems to have converted to Christianity, relocated to the north, and then returned to al-Andalus (and, it seems, to Islam) after he failed to make a living as a court musician (10:390–91). I am grateful to Dwight Reynolds for sharing this reference with me.

10. Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, xiii.

11. Baer, *History*, 1: 327–8; Nirenberg, *Communities*, 128 n. 4.

12. Archivo municipal de Burgos, *Libro de actas*, 1481, f. 51, discussed by López Mata, "Morería," 351–52, who calls it "la conversión más o menos forzada de un moro joven." Similar cases of child converts are found in Fernández Félix, "Children"; Marín and El Hour, "Captives"; and Zorgati, *Pluralism*, 48–74. For a study of archival evidence of Jewish conversion and apostasy in Aragon, see Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*.

13. This discussion draws freely from Cusack, *Conversion*, 1–29. I have found that Lipsett, *Desiring*, 6–9, which I read only after writing this introduction, offers a very similar overview.

14. Peters, *Mutilating God*, 3.

15. James, *Writings*, 177, 34.

16. Nock, *Conversion*, 12.

17. In his essay "L'éducation morale," Durkheim explains, "Conversion, as effectively understood in Christianity, is not the adhesion to certain particular conceptions, to certain specific articles of faith. True conversion is a profound transformation whereby the soul in its entirety, through turning in a completely new direction, changes its position or standpoint, and consequently alters its perspective upon the world" (*Selected Writings*, 207).

18. Sociologists such as Talcott Parsons and Robert Bellah and anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz, Talal Asad, and Webb Keane have all drawn from Weberian concepts in their approach to religion and religious conversion, even as they have sometimes offered sharp critiques. Geertz, for example, despite his criticism of Weber, still makes ample use of Weber's paradigms in characterizing the assertion of Balinese identity against perceived Muslim hegemony as a form of "internal conversion" (*Interpretation* 82–85). See Hefner, introduction, 3–44. Recent trends are also summarized in Bruce, "Sociology," 1–11.

19. Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 51. Similarly Austin-Broos has remarked, "Conversion...is not a quest for utopia but rather for habitus" ("Anthropology," 2).

20. Hefner, introduction, 23. An influential study in this vein is Horton, "African Conversion," especially 101–8.

21. Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 3–4.

22. Asad has argued, "Agency is not a universal property, nor is it a transcendental quality" ("Comments," 271). Keane has taken this critique further, arguing, "Much of our contemporary talk about agency continues to incorporate some of the assumptions about authenticity and liberation found in Christian discourse about paganism" ("Fetishism to Sincerity," 677; see also *Christian Moderns*, 176–97). The work of both implies that, in the context of conversion, the discourse of agency is derived from a Western, and even more particularly Protestant,

conception of selfhood and identity. On Stromberg, see below, n. 52.

23. The eclectic and multidisciplinary treatment of conversion by Rambo in *Understanding Religious Conversion* is notable for its attempt at inclusivity. However, even as he strains to preserve conversion as “a variable phenomenon” (6–7), both “paradoxical” and “elusive” (176), his highly rationalized and structural model also takes as given its reality apart from its signification.

24. DeWeese, *Islamization*, 10.

25. Rambo, *Understanding*, 143–44; cf. Gallagher, *Expectation*, 4–5, 141–42.

26. Morrison, *Understanding*, xii, xiv.

27. *Ibid.*, xv.

28. Kruger, *Spectral Jew*, 13. Also Boyarin, *Unconverted Self*; Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, 143–44.

29. Morrison, *Understanding*, xii.

30. *Ibid.*, xiv. Also BeDuhn: “We are already too late to catch the act of conversion itself” (*Augustine’s*, 6).

31. The historicity debate is a central question of reading the *Confessions* over the past century. The *locus classicus* is Courcelle, *Recherches*, 188–201, to which Ferrari has added numerous studies to prove that Augustine’s depiction is “extremely suspect” (*Conversions* 51). Wills has asserted that, technically, Augustine’s transformation was one of “vocation” rather than “conversion” (*Saint Augustine’s Conversion*, 25). BeDuhn recently stated that Augustine’s conversion is, instead, a “textually-embedded” event (*Augustine’s* 5). For a summary of the debate up to 1962, see Solignac, introduction, 55–85, 246–70; for later sources, see the appendix to Starnes, *Augustine’s Conversion*; Bonner, *Augustine*, 42–51; Plumer (in *Augustine of Hippo, Augustine’s Commentary*, 242–48); O’Donnell’s remarks on 8.12.29 in his edition of *Confessions*, 3:59–61.

32. Augustine, *Augustine’s Commentary*, 248.

33. Cohen, “Mentality,” 33, my emphasis. See CT, 39–41, 165–66; Schmitt, *Conversion*, 12–43. The two poles mediated by Morrison are represented by Saltman, “Hermann’s ‘Opusculum,’” and Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 29–31. Cf. the literalist remarks of Niemeyer in her edition, *Opusculum*, 2–8.

34. Nock, *Conversion*, 254. See also Baden, *Literatur*, 25.

35. Taylor, *Sources*, 139. While arguments such as those of Kieckhefer, “Convention and Conversion,” 36, reading conversion as “a discovery of inwardness or interiority,” may be appropriate in dealing with devotional and mystical texts, they should not be generalized to polemical writing.

36. This critique could be broadened by taking account of recent philosophical discussions of ‘the event.’ Although limitations of space do not permit me to pursue this connection here, I can state briefly that my reading of conversion narratives (and the consideration of conversion as either an event or a process) is not directly concerned with ontological questions. I thus do not address Alain Badiou’s conception of the event as what is beyond ontology, an unthinkable multiplicity that suddenly interrupts the unity of the state of affairs (the ‘world’) with something new and therefore “belongs to that-which-is-not-being-quia-being” (*Being*, 189). Neither do I approach conversion in terms of Gilles Deleuze’s more dynamic ontology of the event as a process of becoming rather than a happening or interruption. It is nevertheless interesting to note that the debate between Badiou and Deleuze about the nature of the event might be compared to the debate about the nature of conversion as either an event or a process, and it is significant in this light that Badiou characterizes Saul/Paul of Tarsus as a “poet-thinker of the event” (*Saint Paul*, 2), and that Deleuze advocates what he calls an “empiricist conversion” (*What Is Philosophy*, 75). However, because I see conversion as an element of what Arthur Danto calls a “narrative sentence” (*Narration*, 143)—that is, a sentence whose sense

is possible only through reference to at least two distinct time-separated events—I also maintain that it cannot be discussed *apart* from the analysis of its narrative structure. My approach thus follows Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic theory of narrative as a mediation for essence and a medium for meaning itself. For a brief comparison of notions of the event in the ontologies of Badiou and Deleuze, see Lecercle, *Deleuze and Language*, 108–18. See Ricoeur, *Freud*, 27, on the dual poles of the hermeneutic field, which I accept here.

37. Miles, *Christ*, 265.

38. Schmitt, *Conversion*, 42–43, 194. Such an approach requires, in Dwight Reynolds’s words, “expanding our analysis to include the modes of interpretation at work, rather than focusing narrowly on the modes and genres of textual production” (“Symbolic Narratives,” 262). It can also help correct an overemphasis on the historical *reality* allegedly behind our sources, such as in Abulafia’s reading of the texts as “reports of discussions that were really held” (“Eleventh-Century Exchange,” 153).

39. Lifshitz, “Beyond Positivism,” 95.

40. Hahn, *Portrayed*, 30. A broad orientation to the field can be acquired from Aigrain and Godding, *L’hagiographie*; Dubois and Lemaitre, *Sources et méthodes*. A very brief overview is given by Head, *Medieval Hagiography*, xxvi–xxxii. I have benefited from Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, 1–14 (on “the historian and the hagiographer”).

41. Cusack, *Conversion*, and Fletcher, *Barbarian Conversion*, offer useful surveys. On the *Legenda*, see Reames, *Legenda Aurea*, 3–4, 197–210.

42. García-Arenal, “Dreams,” and Jones, “Dreams,” offer two useful models.

43. Morrison, *Understanding*, xix, 154–59.

44. On anti-Jewish imagery, see Chapter 2, n. 10.

45. Fredriksen, “Paul,” 33.

46. Harpham, “Conversion,” 44; see also his reworking in *Ascetic*, 98. In following Harpham, I am obviously at odds with readers like Leone, who distinguishes between “representations of conversion” and “conversion *tout court*” (*Religious Conversion*, 69, also 64). At the same time, I am insisting on a more thorough commitment to identity as representation than readers like Jameson, who claims “that history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but...our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious” (*Political Unconscious*, 35).

47. I here follow Stromberg, who posits that conversion should not be looked at “as something that occurred in the past and is now ‘told about’ in the conversion narrative. Rather, the conversion narrative itself is a central element of the conversion” (*Language*, 3). Cf. Funkenstein’s notion, based on Hayden White, of “history” and “counterhistory” (*Perceptions*, 36).

48. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 250.

49. Brown, *Authority*, 20.

50. Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 2.

51. CT, 144.

52. To follow Ricoeur’s terminology, the hermeneutic path must proceed first *with* suspicion beyond a “first naïveté,” but must also continue *past* suspicion into a second, renewed “faith” in the signifying potential of the text (a “second naïveté”) (*Freud*, 496). This process “marks the subordination of the epistemological dimension of reference to the hermeneutical dimension of refiguration” (Ricoeur, *Time*, 3:5, and see 3:142–56). Cf. Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion*, 4. See also Stromberg, who suggests that a conversion “moment” cannot be recorded because “the event is a symbolic construction” (*Language*, 15, 133 n. 10).

53. Studies such as Fletcher, *Barbarian Conversion*; Jones, *Constantine*; and Cusack, *Conversion*, approach conversion as a “top-down” historical phenomenon distinct from individual action or representation. Other studies (such as Bulliet, *Conversion*) approach conversion through different means and methods but still as a social movement.

54. On the general link between conversion and autobiography, in addition to Harpham, “Conversion,” see Riley, *Character*, 19–24; Barbour, *Versions*, 34–53, 205–19. On Christian narratives, which can also include captivity tales or slave narratives, I have benefited from Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion*; Payne, *Self and the Sacred*; Caldwell, *Puritan Conversion*; and Carlebach, *Divided Souls*.

55. I thus amicably part company with approaches to conversion as text that aim to relate that text back to the practices of religious devotion, a kind of “education of the mind and body to empathy” (Morrison, *Understanding*, xvii), as well as modern psychological readings such as Ullman, *Transformed Self*, which links conversion to the trauma of an abusive or absent father. The fruits of the affective turn are evident in numerous recent studies, including Kruger, *Spectral Jew*, especially chapters 2 and 3; and Kieckhefer, “Convention and Conversion.” On the implicit gendering of such “affective” conversion, see Jones, “Woman’s Tears,” 17; Lipsett, *Desiring*, 5, 123–26.

56. Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 18.

57. Kruger, *Spectral Jew*, xxiv. White, *Content*, 9. The stage model of conversion proposed by Rambo, *Understanding*, 16–17 and 165–70, maps easily on to a narrative sequence of dramatic development. “Conversion” can thus be what Harpham calls an “exemplary plot-climax,” as well as the entire narrative arc of that plot (“Conversion,” 43).

58. See Mills and Grafton, who call it “an unyielding form of conquest” (*Conversion*, ix); García-Arenal, “Dreams,” 89–90; and Viswanathan, who describes conversion as “subversion” (*Outside*, xi) and “arguably one of the most unsettling political events in the life of a society” (3, see also 16).

59. Rambo, *Understanding*, 127–28. The symbolic role of modern apostasy has been explored in Bromley, *Politics*. The narrative role of the apostate has been explored by Johnson, “Apostates”; Barbour, *Versions*, 138–68.

60. The most common words for conversion in the New Testament, *strephō* and *epistrephō* (literally “to turn or return”) are frequently employed in a sense of physically turning the body or returning from a trip. Based on *shuv*, “to return,” from the Hebrew Bible, both the Greek *epistrephō* and its Latin calque *convertere* imply a sense of both “returning” and “turning” away from something. Forms of *strephō* appear frequently in the Gospels, often in citations of Isaiah, in a figurative sense of turning back to a better mind or returning to a moral law, and *epistrephō* is associated with the term for repentance, *metanoia*, literally a change of direction or opinion. Both words are used repeatedly in the Synoptics, above all in Luke and Acts (e.g., Matthew 12:41–42; Luke 17:4; Acts 3:19, 11:18–21, 26:20; “repentance” and “faith” can be seen as interchangeable in Acts 20:21). The noun *epistrophē*, “conversion,” however, is only found in one New Testament verse, Acts 15:3. See also Lipsett, *Desiring*, 133 n. 68. On the use of *epistrephō*, see the *Exegetical Dictionary*, 2:40–41; *Theologisches Begriffslexikon*, 2:69–71; Heikkinen, “Notes”; Gaventa, *Darkness to Light*, 40–44; Aubin, *Le problème*, 70–77.

61. Wills, *Saint Augustine’s Conversion*, 81. See Burke, *Rhetoric*, 81–82, 86–117. See also Rambo, *Understanding*, 53; CT, 45; Morrison, *Understanding*, 163–64 and especially 91, where he calls “apostasy the keystone of the pathology of conversion.”

1. On contemporary apocryphal texts, including the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, see Metzger, *Canon*, 165–89. For an analysis of conversion in three examples—*The Shepherd of Hermas*, *Acts of Paul*, and the Jewish novella *Joseph and Aseneth*—see Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*. Another interesting, slightly later, example is *Xanthippe and Polyxena*. On the intersections between ancient novels and early Christian stories, see Pervo, “Ancient Novel.”

2. A comparison of the narrative in Acts and contemporary apocryphal sources with ancient notions of philosophical vocation and calling can be found in Czachesz, *Commission Narratives*, 10–59. Nock, *Conversion*, 17–65; Finn, *Death to Rebirth*; and the essays in Assmann and Stroumsa, *Transformations*, all offer similar comparisons. On conversion as a discourse of monotheistic exclusivity, see Assmann, *Of God*, 123–26. Comparison of ancient and early Christian narratives demands a distinction between what Gerald Peters (following Northrop Frye) calls the “hieroglyphic” (or metaphoric), the “hieratic” (priestly or logocentric), and the “demotic” (everyday or descriptive) characterizations of identity (*Mutilating*, 6–11).

3. Plato, *Republic*, book 7, 518d; Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.8.4. On philosophical conversion, see Nock, *Conversion*, 179–80, and 164–86 in general; Jaeger, *Paideia*, 2:295–300; Foucault, *Hermeneutics*, 207–17.

4. *Confusión*, 1:89. The few studies on Juan include Bobzin, “Bemerkungen”; Yacine Bahri, “Présentation critique”; and my “Preaching Paul,” where I summarize the bibliography.

5. See Wiegers, Review, 258–60; Wiegers, “Moriscos,” 589 n. 6. López-Morillas treats Juan as an existing figure who shows certain knowledge of Muslim exegetical traditions (*El Corán*, 43–44).

6. *Confusion*, 91, emphasis mine.

7. *Ibid.*, 1:91, 3v. On Juan’s use of Arabic sources, see my “Preaching Paul.”

8. *Confusión*, 1:90, 3r.

9. Nock, *Conversion*, 7.

10. For an introductory overview, see Collins, *Apocalyptic*.

11. Cf. Eliade, *Myth*, 130.

12. The distinction (found first in Acts) between “Saul” and “Paul” as his name before and after conversion cannot be confirmed as historical or accurate, but it does reflect the Christian understanding throughout the Middle Ages. On the naming of Saul/Paul, see Buitenwerf, “Acts,” 82–84.

13. Certain phrases, such that of “putting off the old man” and “putting on the new” (Colossians 3:10; cf. Ephesians 4:22–24), are not far from Saul/Paul’s imagery, although they do not appear in the undisputed Epistles. Other images, however (e.g., Titus 3:4–7), seem to conflict directly with Saul/Paul’s characterizations. On the order, authorship, and dating of Saul/Paul’s Epistles, see Roetzel, *Letters of Paul*.

14. On Saul/Paul’s notion of the resurrection as an axial moment, see Keck, *Paul*, 34–62, and see below, notes 17 and 18. The classic study of Saul/Paul’s views of Judaism is Sanders, *Paul*. For an introduction and updated bibliography on the question, see Horrell, *An Introduction*, 89–105.

15. Zink, *Poésie*, 38–39. Considering this view, philosophers have diverged sharply over the question of a possible dialectical understanding in Saul/Paul’s idea of history, which Alain Badiou claims is “foreign to all dialectics” (*Saint Paul*, 70–73) but which Giorgio Agamben calls a “soteriological dialectic” (*Time*, 57). Cf. Taubes, *Political Theology*, 87–88. For an overview of this debate, see Gignac, “Taubes.”

16. Fredriksen, *Jesus to Christ*, 150.

17. In the few passages where Saul/Paul mentions his change (Galatians 1:13–17; Philippians 3:2–11; 1 Corinthians 9:1, 9:16–17, 15:8; 2 Corinthians 4:6), he does not say he “converted” and describes his new understanding as an externally derived event rather than an internal change. In other passages (1 Corinthians 15:5–7; 2

Corinthians 12:2–4; Romans 7:4), he speaks of following Christ in terms of revelation and witness. In the few passages where he does use *epistrophē* in the sense of “turning” to (or away) from God, the emphasis is on backsliding (Galatians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:9) or turning to a figurative interpretation of the Torah (2 Corinthians 3:16, quoting Exodus 34:34). On these passages, see Crook, *Reconceptualizing Conversion*, 155–69.

18. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 9–11, 19–20. On the prophetic call tradition, see Habel, “Form and Significance”; Meagher, “Prophetic Call.” Stendahl and Taubes suggest Saul/Paul was “called” but not converted (Stendahl, “Apostle Paul”; Taubes, *Political Theology*, 13–14, 47; cf. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 6). Fredriksen distinguishes between Saul/Paul’s sense of *halakhic*, or legal, conversion to Judaism through circumcision and *moral* conversion, involving a faith in the God of Israel—something that was available to Jews and Gentiles alike. “In terms of Paul’s own experience... such identifications are a gross anachronism, and they risk representing a false dichotomy. In his own view, Paul was always a Jew, in both phases of his life” (*Augustine*, 34–37, 62–63). Gaventa notes, “The very structure of [Saul/Paul’s] theology militates against the use of conventional conversion language” (*Darkness to Light*, 44).

19. On dating New Testament texts, see Brown, *Introduction*, 3–19 and throughout.

20. Differences in the terminology and conceptualization of time between Acts, the Gospels, and the Epistles directly reflect this hierarchization of narrative over event in Acts. The linear model of *chronos* (linear or historical time) in Acts dialectically combines, on a narrative level, the competing images of conversion in the Gospels and Epistles. Symbolically, this telling and retelling in Acts subsumes the *kairos* (“right time” or “time at hand”) of conversion into a *chronos* of linear, narrative history. In Aristotelian terms, this represents a fusion of the two elements of climax in a Greek tragedy, *peripeteia*, or reversal, and *anagnoresis*, or recognition. Its mode, however, is comic, not tragic, stressing the ultimate triumph of the protagonist. On *diegesis* and *mimesis* in narratology, see Genette, *Narrative*, 162–68.

21. This history has been considered in detail. See Baer, *History*, 2:95–138; Wolff, “1391 Pogrom”; Netanyahu, *Origins*, 132–67; Mitre Fernández, *Los judíos*.

22. Klepper, *Insight of Unbelievers*, 6. On Lyra, see also Hailperin, *Rashi*; the overview by Cohen, *Friars*, 174–95; the essays in Krey and Smith, *Nicholas of Lyra*; Reinhardt, “Das Werk”; Lubac, *Exégèse*, seconde partie 2: 344–52. Klepper provides an up-to-date bibliography on Lyra’s work. For a partial listing of manuscripts and printed editions of the *Additions*, see Reinhardt and Santiago-Otero, *Biblioteca bíblica*, 241–44. For a list of printings of Lyra’s *Postillae*, to which Pablo’s *Additions* were frequently attached, see Gosselin, “Listing,” Pablo’s and Lyra’s prologues to their commentaries are available along with the *Glossa Ordinaria* in *PL* 113:35–60. References here to Lyra’s *Postilla* and Pablo’s *Additions* are from *Biblia*. The *Scrutinium Scripturarum* is extant in over fifty manuscripts and was published in no fewer than five editions between 1469 and 1478, and was last published in 1591. For a listing, see Reinhardt and Santiago-Otero, *Biblioteca bíblica*, 245–48. It has recently been edited in two doctoral dissertations (unavailable to me): Visiers Lecanda, “El Scrutinium”; Martínez de Bedoya, “La segunda parte.” All references here are to the Burgos, 1591, edition.

23. Luther, *Works*, 4:99, 138, 156; 47:138, 180, etc. In *Jews and Their Lies*, Luther cites Solomon/Pablo’s *Additions* as the work of “one of their very learned rabbis” (47:228; cf. 138 and 217).

24. Benito Ruano, *Toledo*; Netanyahu, *Origins*, 324–84.

25. *Biblia*, 1:16r. Also in *PL* 11335B, with my corrections.

26. On Pablo’s personal copy of Lyra’s *Postillae*, see my “Scrutinizing,” 1045, n.

27. *Biblia*, 1:16r. Also in *PL*, 113:35B.

28. *Biblia*, 1:16r. Also in *PL*, 113:35B–D.

29. *Biblia*, 1:16v. Also in *PL*, 113:36B–C.

30. “And yet neither were those successes lacking which the vulgar call prosperous. For divine grace has raised me, though completely undeserving, to no mean level of ecclesiastical authority. In fact, at first promoted to the see of Cartagena and then to this of Burgos, I have been nourished by the abundant favors of God’s Church” (*Biblia*, 1:16v; also in *PL*, 113:36A–B).

31. On his theory of the literal sense in exegesis, see *Biblia*, 1:17v–18r; in *PL*, 113:43–45; Lubac, *Exègèse*, second partie, 2:281; Spicq, *Esquisse*, 277 n. 1; my “Scrutinizing,” 114–16.

32. *Biblia*, 1:16v. Also in *PL*, 113:36c

33. Addition to Psalm 59:11 (listed as Psalm 58). *Biblia*, 2:154. Solomon/Pablo here names Moses/Petrus Alfonsi and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid.

34. *Biblia*, 1:16v. Also in *PL*, 113:37C–D.

35. Wills, 8.12.30, 1:102.

36. Outside of book 8 of the *Confessions*, examples include the baptism of his unnamed moribund friend (4.4.8), the “fall” of Alypius at the circus (6.7.1112) before his later conversion with Augustine (8.30, 9.14), the abandoning of Manichaeism by the priest who refuses to baptize Augustine (3.12.21), the conversions of Augustine’s friends at Cassiciacum, Verecundus, and Nebridus (9.3.5, 9.3.6), the baptism of Augustine’s father Patricius (9.9.19) and son Adeodatus (9.6.14), the recovery of his mother from wine-tipping (9.8.19), and the conversion of Evodius (9.8.17). For a shorter list, see Van Fleteren, “Augustine’s Theory,” 65–80.

Within book 8, conversions include that of the orator Marius Victorinus, of Sergius Paulus (the proconsul of Cyprus during Saul/Paul’s first mission), as well as of two friends of the African Ponticianus, of their betrothed fiancées, and of Saint Anthony. See Wills, *Augustine’s Conversion* 4. On the string of conversion in Acts, see Nock, *Conversion*, 254; and the extended reading in BeDuhn, *Augustine’s*, 193–217. On Saul/Paul as Augustine’s model, see Ferrari, “Augustine.”

37. *Confessions*, 8.12.29, 1:101; Wills, 181, with my changes.

38. *Confessions*, 8.6.14, 1:94; Wills, 171.

39. *Confessions*, 8.6.15, 1:95; Wills, 172–73.

40. *Confessions*, 8.7.16, 1:95; Wills, 173.

41. *Confessions*, 8.5.10, 1:92; Wills, 168.

42. Wills, *Augustine’s Conversion*, 5. The idea that Augustine underwent multiple conversions dates back at least to the 1921 article of María Peters, “Augustins erste Bekehrung.” For repetitions of this, see O’Connell, *Images*, 82 n. 2.

43. It is “a book by a man known as Cicero” that Augustine claims “changed my life” (*Confessions*, 1:25–26; Wills 45–46). It was “reading [the astrological] charts” of Jacob and Esau and, finally, studying “certain books of the Platonists” (*Confessions*, 1:79, 80; Wills, 144, 147), that “did provoke in me a return into myself.” It is through a spiraling series of sequential readings and interpretations that we arrive at the climax of book 7, in which Augustine writes, “I came to the revered writings of your Spirit, and especially to the apostle Paul, with a grasping eagerness” (*Confessions*, 1:86; Wills, 156). On the importance of reading, see Stock, *Augustine*, 75–111; Burton, *Language*, 88–111.

44. The very first use of *conversus* or any related word comes long before book 8, in book 1 of the text (1.6.7), and refers not to Augustine but to God himself: “You will change your mood [*conversus*] and have pity on me” (*Confessions* 1.6.7, 1:5; Wills, 6). The most frequent use of the term is in the final book (13.4.5), where

Augustine uses the word to refer to creation that perform “must be turned back to him who made it” (13.4.5, 1:185; Wills, 315).

45. On book 8 as the structural turning point of the narrative, see O'Donnell's remarks in *Confessions*, on 8.12.28, 3:56.

46. He endorsed a proto-orthodox canon of Scripture (including Acts) at the synod of Hippo in 393, later repeated in *De Doctrina Christiana*. See Metzger, *Canon*, 314–15; La Bonnardière, “Canon.”

47. Fredriksen, “Paul,” 22. For a detailed treatment of the first years of Augustine's struggles with Manichaean thought, before his deep engagement with Saul/Paul, see BeDuhn, *Augustine's*.

48. Augustine, *Augustine on Romans*, 34.

49. Brown, *Augustine*, 170; Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*, 37; Augustine, *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, 395. Cf. Sermon 169.10 in *PL*, 38:921; trans. in *Sermons 148–183*, 229. On this transformation in his thinking about grace, see Bonner, *Freedom*, 26, 40–46; Hombert, *Gloria*, 91–99; Courcelle, *Recherches*, 258; Fredriksen, *Augustine*, 201–2, among numerous others.

50. Hombert, *Gloria*, 404–30.

51. Fredriksen, “*Excaecati*,” 309 n. 24 and the sources referenced there. Although critics such as Bonner have downplayed the role of Acts in Augustine's thought (“Augustine's ‘Conversion,’” 112), the sermons offer ample evidence to the contrary. See sermons 168, 169, 170, 175, 278, 279, 294, 295, 299, 299c, all in *PL*, vol. 38. On his sermons, see Rebillard, “*Sermones*.” On the Manichaean rejection of Acts and Augustine's response, see Teske, “Augustine,” 211–12, 219 n. 26.

52. As Wetzel explains, in the shift from his *Expositio* to his *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*, “Augustine gives to God a role that he had once reserved to the human agent, and nothing remains quite the same in his theology thereafter. The theological conversion sets the stage for the *Confessions*, where Paul mediates a conversion of a different sort. The conversions mirror one another” (*Limits*, 145). See also Fredriksen, *Augustine*, 183. Cf. the comparison of Baden, *Literatur*, 30–38.

53. Freccero remarks that Augustine “set the pattern for this Christian thematization of narrative structure in his *Confessions*” but that “it was the Christian theme that gave rise to the narrative” (*Dante*, 265). On Augustine's theory of figural language, see Dawson, “Figure”; Dawson, *Figural Reading*, 84–97; Cameron, “Christological Substructure”; Bernard, “In Figura”; and the classic discussions in Auerbach, “Figura,” 37–43; Charity, *Events*, especially 148–78.

54. Paul Ricoeur came to rely heavily on Augustine in articulating his argument that historical “time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence” (*Time*, 1:52). On *analepsis* and *prolepsis* in narratology, see Genette, *Narrative*, 40.

55. Stock, *Augustine*, 74.

56. *Confessions*, 11.13.16, 1:153–54; Wills, 266.

57. Fredriksen, “Paul,” 27. Cf. similar remarks by Stowers (A *Rereading*, 3) and Taylor (*Sources*, 131). Augustine's model characterized both *history* and the individual *soul* as equally important conduits of divine grace, carriers that were united along a third, the vector of Scriptural text. The predominant medieval understanding of conversion, apart from certain devotional and mystical contexts, did not give precedence to any one of these three aspects. The contribution of Augustine to the localization of the modern self in a realm of “inwardness” should be seen as a post-medieval formulation that came to emphasize Augustinian grace in place of *auctoritas*. In the well-known formulation of Warfield, “the Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace

over Augustine's doctrine of the church" (*Calvin*, 322–23). For Augustine's influence on Luther and the early modern Augustinian order, see Saak, *High Way*, especially 629–30; Saak, "Reception."

58. For example, Solomon/Pablo's characteristically Scholastic phrase "According to the Philosopher in *Posterior Analytics* I: that, on account of which a thing is [in a certain way], it is itself more [that very way] [*Propter aliud unumquodque et illud magis*]" (*Biblia* 1: 16v; cf. *PL*, 113:38) is found constantly throughout the *Summa Theologica* (e.g., 1.16.1.3, 1.87.2.3, 1.88.3.2, 1–2.71.3, 1–2.109.3; 2–2.26.3, 3.2.7.3, etc.). Similarly, "Thus [says] Augustine on the literal meaning of Genesis: Since divine Scripture can be explained in multiple ways, one should not adhere to any particular explanation" (*Biblia* 1: 17r; cf. *PL*, 113:40A–B). This passage is only loosely based on Augustine's *Literal commentary on Genesis* (I.18.36–37, 19.38–39, 21.41) and is taken directly from *Summa Theologica*, I.68.1c. For Solomon/Pablo's claim that "Augustine says on Genesis 2, 'In any [passage], only the literal sense is to be sought'" (*Biblia*, 1:17r; *PL*, 40B), see Aquinas's *Quodlibet* vii. q6.a2.arg5, in *Opera*, vol. 25.

CHAPTER 2

1. *Opusculum*, 69–70; *CT*, 76.
2. See introduction n. 33.
3. *Opusculum* 122; *CT*, 110. Cf. Schmitt, *Conversion*, 64.
4. *Confessions*, 8.3.8, 1:91; Wills, 166.
5. *Confessions*, 8.4.9, 1:92, my translation, but see Wills, 167.
6. *Confessions*, 8.4.9, 1:92, my translations, but see Wills, 167–8.
7. Letter 149.9 in Augustine, *S. Aureli*, 356; Cohen, *Living Letters*, 39.
8. For a list of Augustine's terminology, see Cohen, *Living Letters*, 36 n. 32. For Aquinas's statement, see caput 9, lectio 2 of his commentary on Romans 9:6–13, in Thomas Aquinas, *S. Thomae*, 1:21–23.
9. On this and related terms, see Cohen, *Living Letters*, 3 n. 3; Dahan, *Les intellectuels*, 585; Markus, "The Jew."
10. On the extensive bibliography on *Synagoga* and *Ecclesia*, see Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 1:48–50, 1:255 n. 87; Blumenkranz, *Le juif médiéval*, 41–56; Schreckenberg, *The Jews*, 31–74, and the bibliography there; Lipton, *Images*, especially 2, 146–47 nn. 7–9; Schmitt, *Conversion*, 114–44.
11. Langmuir (*Towards a Definition*) and Little (*Religious Poverty*) have linked anti-Jewish sentiment to a twelfth-century Christian crisis of identity produced by the development of a monetary economy of rising urban centers. Moore (*Persecuting Society*) has linked the shift to a wider change in the definition of normativity. Papal historians such as Grayzel (*Church and the Jews*), Stow (*The "1007 Anonymous"*), Simonsohn (*Apostolic See*), and Pakter (*Medieval Canon Law*) have all pointed to a notable deterioration in traditional papal protections of Jews during and after the twelfth century. Abulafia (*Christians and Jews*) and Funkenstein (*Perceptions; "Changes"*) have argued that the twelfth century saw a fundamental change in the polemical arguments used against Jews: for the first time they were based on philosophical and rational rather than Scriptural arguments. Cohen (*Friars*) and Chazan (*Daggers*) have also stressed the importance of the thirteenth century, but see also Cohen, *Living Letters*, 358–61 for a reassessment.
12. Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*, 3:246.
13. Dante, *Convivio* IV.6.5 (3:293); Dante, *Banquet*, 162.
14. Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, 26, 157; Chenu, "Auctor" and *La théologie*; Ziolkowski, "Cultures," 431–32; Szpiech, "Latin," 63–64.

15. Zimmermann, "Ouverture," 11.
16. Gilbert of Poitiers, *Commentaries*, 54. See Dahan, "Innovation," 261.
17. Richard of Saint Victor, *Les Douze Patriarches*, 322–24.
18. V.11 of Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, 205. For Venantius's poem (*Carmina* 5.5) "In venerabilibus famulis operator opime," see Venantius Fortunatus, *Venanti Honori*, 107–12. On Gregory's and Venantius's accounts, see Blumenkranz, *Juifs et Chrétiens*, 89–99, 140–41; Goffart, "Conversions," 473–97.
19. VI.5 of Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, 268.
20. *Ibid.*, 269, 271.
21. Augustine attacked Julian of Eclanum in *Contra Iulianum* 1.29 for maintaining that "what reason argues authority cannot lay claim to [*quod ratio arguit non potest auctoritas vindicare*]," (cited in Smalley, *Study*, 16). On Augustine's notion of *auctoritas*, see O'Donnell's comments on *Confessions*, 1.8.13, 2:59–60; Lückte, *Auctoritas*; Lückte, "Auctoritas," 1:498–510; Eno, "Authority." On Carolingian conceptions of *auctoritas* and *ratio*, see Riché, "Divinapagina," 2:720; MacDonald, *Authority*.
22. For John's remarks, see I.69 of John Scotus Eriugena, *De Divisione naturae*, in *PL*, 122:513B; and 57.15 of *Annotationes in Marcianum*, 64. Rabanus's remarks can be found in his *Commentaria*, 673. On both, see Riché, "Divina Pagina," 745.
23. Agobard of Lyons, *Epistolae*, 214, 218.
24. See Cantin, "Ratio"; Cowdrey, *Lanfranc*, 59–74.
25. See Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*, 44–46; Southern, "St. Anselm."
26. Anslem, *S. Anselmi Opera*, 2:125. See Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*, 45.
27. Adelard of Bath, *Conversations*, 102–3, quoted in Chenu, *La théologie*, 27; Tolan, *Saracens*, 160. On the transformations of *ratio* and *auctoritas* between the late eleventh century and the mid-twelfth, see Arduini, "Magistra Ratione."
28. Abelard continues, "Many questions arise about the wording of this authoritative text itself, so that a judgment needs to be made about them [the words] before it can be made by means of it [the proof text]" (II.78 of *Collationes*, 98–99, with my modifications). On Abelard's discussion of authority, see Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, 59–63.
29. On Abelard's condemnation, see Brown, *Contrary Things*, 75–79. For the condemnation of William of Conches, see William of Saint Thierry, *De Erroribus*, 333, 340; Chenu, *La théologie*, 29.
30. 1.30 of "De fide catholica," in *PL*, 210:305–430 at 333A.
31. Chenu, *La théologie*, 360.
32. MacDonald, *Authority*, 104–13.
33. In 15.23 of the *City of God*, Augustine states, "The authority of the true Scriptures has been transmitted to us by a most certain and well-ascertained succession," while in apocryphal sources, "because of many false things, there is no canonical authority in them [*nulla est canonica auctoritas*]" (*Civitate Dei*, 2:491). His distinction was repeated by Isidore of Seville (d. 636) in the *Etymologies* (*PL*, 82:135), Rabanus Maurus (d. 856) in *De Universo* (*PL*, 111:110), and Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141) in his *Eruditio didascalica* (*PL*, 176:781), among various others.
34. Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, 11.
35. Peter Damiani, *Sermones*, 34.
36. Peter Damiani, *Dialogus*, *PL*, 145:65–67; Peter Damiani, *Letters*, 79–82.
37. Chenu, *La théologie*, 355 n. 4; Ziolkowski, "Cultures," 444.
38. Cohen (*Living Letters*, 183–85) also notes that Crispin never fully embraced a rationalist agenda, despite his claims to have done so. Gilbert himself uses the expression *ratione et auctoritate* (*Works*, 27).
39. See Ziolkowski, "Cultures," 442–47 and, in the context of polemical writing, Dahan, *Les intellectuels*, 423–71.

40. Peter of Cluny, *Adversus Iudaeorum*, 83.

41. Dahan, *Les intellectuels*, 423–27, summarizes the *auctoritas/ratio* dyad, which itself is abundant in twelfth- and thirteenth-century polemics. Lasker, *Philosophical Polemics*, 1–11, adds a third category and divides rational polemics into “common sense” and more strict philosophical arguments based on fixed categories and terms. Funkenstein argues that the introduction of rational arguments marked a parallel shift in polemical writing (*Perceptions*, 17275). See also Dahan, “L’usage.”

42. Dahan, *Les intellectuels*, 424, 441.

43. Moore, *Formation*, 6–61, provides the standard account. Cf. his revised account in “Heresy,” 41; and Iogna-Prat, *Order*, 13–24.

44. Kedar, *Crusade*, 42–96.

45. Peter of Cluny, *Adversus Iudaeorum*, 57–58. Cf. similar statements, such as “It seems to me, O Jew, that with so many prooftexts and with rational argumentation so extensive I have satisfied any human being...[including] you too, if you are in fact human” (125). On this argument by Peter, see Funkenstein, *Perceptions*, 192–94; Funkenstein, “Basic Types,” 378–80; as well as Cohen, *Living Letters*, 254–70; Iogna-Prat, *Order*, 275–322.

46. 1.2 of Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in *Opera*, 13:6; translation in *Summa* (trans. Pegis), 1:62. On Aquinas and *auctoritas*, see Chenu, *Toward Understanding*, 126–55, 292–93.

47. Iogna-Prat, *Order*, 144.

48. On Christian references to Islamic sources before the twelfth century, see Tolan, *Saracens*, 71–134. On references to rabbinical literature, including by Agobard of Lyons, see Merchavia, *Church*, 3–94; Funkenstein, *Perceptions*, 189–91; Cohen, *Living Letters*, 123–46.

49. On Peter’s anti-Muslim writing, see Kritzeck, *Peter*; Iogna-Prat, *Order*, 323–57; Tolan, *Saracens*, 155–65.

50. Cohen, *Friars*, 14; Chazan, *Daggers*, 175, respectively.

51. Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, 10.

52. *Ibid.*, 11.

53. Burman points out “an important irony” in the early manuscripts of Robert of Ketton’s Qur’ān translation: the task of outfitting the text with familiar “scholastic qualities” such as small divisions and rubrics “meant to control (or attempt to control) how it was read. Yet it also meant granting it, almost necessarily, a kind of authority and prestige.... [T]he heretical scripture of Christendom’s principal rival thus became an authoritative source of arguments against that very rival” (*Reading*, 63).

54. On types of medieval prologues, see Hunt, “Introductions”; Quain, “Medieval Accessus.”

55. Guillaume himself did not tell his own story. It is found in Guibert of Nogent’s autobiographical memoirs, the *Monodiae*. On Guillaume, see Sherwood, “Convert of 1096,” 155–56.

56. On Otloh in comparison with Guibert, see Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 75–77. On Aelred’s concept of spiritual conversion, see Sommerfeldt, *Aelred of Rievaulx*, 81–87. On his account on his own conversion, see Billy, “Aelred.” For a summary, see Schmitt, *Conversion*, 50–62.

57. I am grateful to my student Yanay Israeli for this insight. On conversion in crusade chronicles, see Loutchitskaja, “L’idée”; Kedar, “Multidirectional Conversion”; Kedar, *Crusade*, 57–72.

58. Kruger, *Spectral Jew*, 39–59, compares the memoirs with his anti-Jewish *tractatus de incarnatione* and his anti-Muslim *Gesta dei per Francos* and is right to situate Guibert’s arguments about conversion within the question of the body and its impurities. It is telling that Guibert hardly uses the term *auctoritas* in the memoirs,

especially in the autobiographical first book. See also Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 111–31.

59. Although Herman's text is not from the same geographical area as the other texts studied here, its language reflects the slow expansion of *auctoritas* within a polemical context. It is no coincidence that the text was first printed together with the *Pugio fidei* of Ramon Martí in the Leipzig edition of 1687.

60. Seventy-nine manuscripts of the *Dialogue* are listed by Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi*, 182–98, most of them datable to before 1500, dwarfing the four surviving manuscripts of the *Opusculum* listed by Niemeyer in her edition, 49–61, two from the seventeenth century. Moreover, the *Dialogue* achieved even wider exposure, being incorporated into sections of the *Speculum Historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais. On its reception, see Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi*, 95–131.

61. A summary of the critical treatment of the *Dialogue* is provided by Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi*, in the notes to 12–33 (214–21), and in the introduction of Resnick to his translation (*Dialogue*, xiv–xxv, 3–36).

62. Cohen, “*The Mentality*,” 23. On Cohen's reading, see introduction n. 33.

63. *Diálogo*, 7; *Dialogue*, 41. N.B.: For all citations of the *Dialogue*, I have compared the 1996 edition from Huesca with the text in Mieth, “*Der Dialog*,” and have noted any discrepancies. Where the two agree, I give only the 1996 edition.

64. *Diálogo*, 13; *Dialogue*, 50.

65. *Diálogo*, 16; *Dialogue*, 53.

66. *Diálogo*, 29; *Dialogue*, 72.

67. *Diálogo*, 45; *Dialogue*, 90. The Huesca edition reads “*rarionis*,” but see Mieth, “*Der Dialog*,” 28.

68. *Diálogo*, 50; *Dialogue*, 95–96.

69. *Dialogue*, 29. See also Funkenstein, *Perceptions*, 183–89; Merchavia, *Church*, 122–24.

70. *Diálogo*, 84; *Dialogue*, 137.

71. *Diálogo*, 96, 52; *Dialogue*, 154, 98.

72. *Diálogo*, 58, 129; *Dialogue*, 107, 196.

73. *Diálogo*, 69; *Dialogue*, 119.

74. *Diálogo*, 69; *Dialogue*, 119; Resnick's introduction, *Dialogue*, 32.

75. *Diálogo*, 8–9; *Dialogue*, 43. The Huesca edition mistakenly reads “*doctoru*.” Mieth, “*Der Dialog*,” 2, gives the correct text.

76. *Diálogo*, 91; *Dialogue*, 146.

77. *Diálogo*, 6; *Dialogue*, 41.

78. *Diálogo*, 8–9; *Dialogue*, 42–43.

79. *Diálogo*, 10; *Dialogue*, 44.

80. Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, 143.

81. *Diálogo*, 5; *Dialogue*, 39.

82. Boyarin, *Unconverted Self*, 2.

83. *Opusculum*, 72; CT, 78.

84. Schmitt calls the *Little Work* and *Life of Godfried* “two versions of the same account, in the same way in which ethnologists speak of different versions of the same myth” (*Conversion*, 11). On the connection between the documents, see 180–89.

85. *Opusculum*, 77–79; CT, 81–82.

86. *Opusculum*, 79; CT, 82, with my changes.

87. *Opusculum*, 82; CT, 82.

88. *Opusculum*, 96; CT, 93, with my changes.

89. *Opusculum*, 97; CT, 94.

90. *Opusculum*, 71–72; CT, 77–78.

91. Schmitt, *Conversion*, 76; CT, 53. See also Kruger, *Dreaming*, 154–65; Kruger, *Spectral Jew*, 108.

92. In his *Expositio in Apocalypsim* and repeatedly in his other writing, Rupert characterizes Jews not only, as in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, as “the synagogue of Satan [*synagoga Satanae*],” but as those who betrayed Jesus “with a diabolical instinct [*instinctu Diaboli*].” PL, 169:870, 1173. Judah/Herman himself uses this phrase (*Opusculum*, 97; CT, 93; see Morrison’s note at 175 n. 94).

93. Cf. the contrary argument by Cohen, *Living Letters*, 297.

94. *Opusculum*, 74; CT, 79.

95. *Opusculum*, 110, 102; CT, 102, 97.

96. *Opusculum*, 126; CT, 113.

97. *Opusculum*, 117; CT, 107.

98. Kruger, *Spectral Jew*, 18–19.

99. *Ibid.*, 111.

100. *Opusculum*, 79–80; CT, 83.

101. *Opusculum*, 82–83; CT, 84–85.

102. *Opusculum*, 90, 92; CT, 89, 90.

103. *Opusculum*, 118, 120; CT, 107–9.

104. Vitz, *Medieval Narrative*, 19–20.

105. “It was indeed an appropriate about-face for women to raise up by their prayers a man who had fallen because of a woman [*ut per feminam lapsum femine precibus sublevarent*]” (*Opusculum*, 108; CT, 101). Elukin suggests that the importance of women is stressed as a strategy to heighten the “miraculous” nature of the protagonist’s conversion (*Living Together*, 72–73). On the role of “women’s tears” and female piety in the conversion of men, see introduction n.

106. *Confessions*, 8.3.8, 1:91; Wills, 166.

107. Morrison, *Understanding*, 32.

108. *Opusculum*, 70, 73; CT, 77–78.

109. *Opusculum*, 113, 74; CT, 104, 79.

110. Bynum, *Metamorphosis*, 53.

111. *Opusculum*, 74–75; CT, 80.

112. *Opusculum*, 120; CT, 109, with my changes.

113. *Opusculum*, 102; CT, 97, with my changes.

114. Schmitt, *Conversion*, 196. See his discussion of Rupert on 130–44.

115. *Opusculum*, 114; CT, 105.

116. *Diálogo*, 193; *Dialogue*, 273.

117. Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, 12.

118. Bernard of Clairvaux stated in letter 363, directed to crusading armies, “Jews are for us the living letters [*vivi apices*], perpetually representatives of the Lord’s Passion, and witnesses [*testes*] of our redemption” (*Epistolae*, 567). Similarly, the convert becomes a living letter of a dead law and the spiritual interpretation of that living letter.

119. Kruger, *Spectral Jew*, 13.

120. *Opusculum*, 127; CT, 113, with my changes.

CHAPTER 3

1. *Annales*, 27–28; *The Annals*, 41–42. See Riess, “From Aachen,” 133–40; Savigni, “La conversion,” 8–11.

2. Gil, *Corpus*, 1:227–28.

3. Fletcher, *Barbarian Conversion*, 289–91.

4. Gil, *Corpus*, 1:269–70, 1:244.

5. *Ibid.*, 1:234.

6. *Ibid.*, 1:243, 1:269.

7. Ibid., 1:249.

8. Albert of Metz, *De Diversitate*, sections 1.7, 2.22–24, pp. 16–18, 88–104. For an analysis and translation, see Abulafia, “Eleventh-Century Exchange,” 165–71. On possible references to Wecelinus in the Cairo Genizah, see below, n. 20.

9. Albert of Metz, *De Diversitate*, 16.

10. Ibid., 16–18.

11. Ibid., 18.

12. Ibid., 88.

13. On rabbinic traditions treating Ruth and Jethro as proselytes, see Bamberger, *Proselytism*, 182–99. On the many examples citing Rahab as a proselyte (e.g., BT Zevahim 116b), see Baskin, “Rabbinic Transformations.”

14. On conversion in the Hebrew Bible, see Kaminsky, “A Light,” and the sources summarized there. On late Second-Temple notions of conversion, see Thiessen, *Contesting*, 3–17. On the continuity of biblical and talmudic notions of impurity and foreignness, see Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 107–22.

15. Porton, *Stranger*, 3. On conversion in the talmudic period, beyond Porton, see Bamberger, *Proselytism*, 60–123; Hoenig, “Conversion”; Rosenbloom, *Conversion*, 35–64.

16. Genesis Rabbah 47:10; Leviticus Rabbah 2; Rashi on Genesis 12:5; and Maimonides’ Epistle on Conversion (to Obadiah), where he affirms, “Ever since you came under the wings of the Divine Presence and professed the Lord, there is no difference between you and us.” See Moses ben Maimon [Maimonides], *Igrot ha-Rambam*, 240.

17. In Esther 8:17, *hityahad* might mean “pretend to be like those of Judah,” while in postbiblical writing it can describe “becoming a Jew,” and the term *nitgayyer* “to become a proselyte.” The words for *apostasy* (leaving Judaism for another religion) in rabbinical writing are varied. An apostate is called *meshummad* (“destroyed”) or *mumar* (a “changer”), although these can also refer to transgression against commandments without conversion. In other contexts, the terms *min* and *apikoros* (“heretic”), *posh’e a Yisra’el* (“one who transgresses against Israel”), and *kofer* (“one who denies”) are also used, generally to refer to disbelief but not necessarily adopting another religion—heresy can lead to conversion, but one does not need to be converted to be a heretic. Also common are other terms from the root *shamad*, like *le-shammed* (“to coerce into apostasy”) and *nishtammed* (“to be converted or apostatized”), and *anus* (a “forced” convert). Judeo-Arabic sources also use Hebrew terms for conversion to other religions also, using *pasha’*, “to commit a sin or crime,” for conversion to Islam, and *shamad* for conversion to Christianity (and *posh’e a/meshummad*, respectively, for a “convert”). All of these terms are laden with multiple meanings and depend on context for their sense. According to the rabbinical notion that “although he sinned, he is still Israel” (BT Sanhedrin 44a), some argued it is possible to adopt foreign customs or beliefs, but it is technically impossible to give up one’s Jewish identity. On this rabbinical notion, see Chapter 5, n. 77. On Arabic for conversion in Islam, see Chapter 6, n. 7. I am grateful to Daniel Lasker for his help sorting out these terms.

18. Kellner, *Maimonides*, 2–5, 101. For an overview of conversion to Judaism during the medieval period, see Seligson, “Post-Talmudic Period”; Rosenbloom, *Conversion*, 67–89, 101–14.

19. Kellner, *Maimonides*, 1; Katz, *Tradition*, 23–24. On Maimonides’ view, see Kellner, 33–64; Diamond, “Maimonides.” On Halevi’s view, see Lasker, “Proselyte Judaism.”

20. Abulafia (“Eleventh-Century Exchange,” 156–57) calls into question the arguments of Norman Golb in “A Study,” who asserts that Wecelinus is the same convert as that mentioned in a letter by Shemu’el ben Yizḥaq ha-Sefardi preserved

in the Cairo Genizah, now Ms. Cambridge Or 1080J, no. 115. Golb briefly addresses Abulafia's skepticism and reaffirms his position in "La Conversione," 74 n. 13.

21. Ms. Cambridge Taylor-Schechter 16.100, published by Mann, *Texts*, 1:31–33, and corrected and translated by Golb, "New Light," 53–63. Golb summarizes many of the references to proselytes in the Genizah ("Notes," 69–74; "La Conversione," 68–86), and more are mentioned by Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 2:303–11. Recently, Rustow, *Heretics*, 254–65, discusses a few interesting trends in the "eighty or so cases" (255) of conversion to Judaism that she has examined from 1006 to 1234.

22. Pritsak, "Khazar Kingdom's," 272. Cf. Golb and Pritsak, who call them "epic tales" (*Khazarian Hebrew*, 132). In considering the Khazar documents in a wider historical context, DeWeese draws connections between these narratives and what he calls the "epic-style legends of origin in inner Asia" (*Islamization*, 301).

23. The Hebrew texts (a long version in a medieval manuscript and a short version in an early modern manuscript) were edited by Kokovcov, *Evrejsko-xazarskaja perepiska*, and a noncritical edition with translation is available (*The Kuzari*, 635–71). My translation follows Pritsak, "Khazar Kingdom's," 272–74, based on the Kokovcov text.

24. Kokovcov, *Evrejsko-xazarskaja perepiska*, 22.

25. *Ibid.*, 23.

26. The Schechter letter was first published by Solomon Schechter, "Khazar Document." The text was republished with some corrections by Kokovcov, *Evrejsko-xazarskaja perepiska*, 33–36. A new, fully corrected edition with facing translation was produced by Golb, in Golb and Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew*, 106–21. The text and translation given here follow Golb's text, 106–9.

27. Golb and Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew*, 110–11, with my changes.

28. On the impact and dissemination of the *Kuzari*, see Shear, *Kuzari*, 21–94.

29. For a summary of the references to the Khazar conversion, see Golden, "Conversion," 123–62.

30. Judah Ha-Levi, *Kitāb al-radd*, 3. My translation draws in part from Hirschfeld's and in part from Korobkin's translations.

31. Judah Ha-Levi, *Kitāb al-radd*, 3.

32. Lasker, *Philosophical Polemics*, 182 n. 2.

33. Judah Ha-Levi, *Kitāb al-radd*, 42.

34. *Ibid.*, 39–40. Cf. Lobel, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 51–53, 130.

35. Lasker, "Proselyte Judaism," 78, 85.

36. This summary is based on *ibid.*, 89–90. Berger argues that Halevi's intention is not polemical but was directed at Jewish readers to convince them to return to Israel ("New Understanding," 224).

37. Not all manuscript evidence is from the Genizah, but a large share is. See Stroumsa's manuscript descriptions (Dawūd, *Dawūd*, 35–39).

38. Ms. Cambridge Taylor-Schechter 12.732, edited in Assaf, *Texts*, 149. I have followed the corrections by Golb, "Notes," 71.

39. Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic*, 1:28. On the translation of *usquf* as "priest" rather than "bishop," see 1:52 n. 1.

40. *Ibid.*, 1:52, 2:27, with my changes.

41. *Ibid.*, 1:95, 2:97.

42. *Ibid.*, 1:52, 2:27.

43. On the impact of the Hebrew Nestor text, see Rembaum, "Influence"; Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic*, 1:34–35. Concerning the similarities to Christian narratives, Hames suggests the intriguing but conjectural possibility that the Arabic text itself may have been based on an even earlier, intra-Christian polemic between Nestorians and Monophysites (review of *Polemic of Nestor*, 471–74).

44. Obadiah, 95. Golb summarizes the sources of Giuàn/Obadiah's text on 77–94. The fragments containing his conversion narrative are Budapest Kaufmann Genizah Ms. 134 fols. 1–2 and Cambridge Taylor-Schechter Ms. 8.271, fols. 1–2. An English version has been published online (Golb, “Autograph Memoirs”). An Italian translation can be found in De Rosa and Perani, *Giovanni-Ovadiyah*, 245–74, including plates of the manuscripts (281–303). See Prawer, “Autobiography,” and the overview by Epstein, *Purity Lost*, 144–48.

45. Obadiah, 105/trans. 17.

46. Obadiah, 95/trans. 1–2. Golb rejects both the proposal of Assaf (the editor of the Ms. Cambridge T-S 12.732, considered above) that the author of the “fourteen pamphlets” might be Giuàn/Obadiah, and also the proposal of Blumenkranz that he be identified with Archbishop Andraeas (“Notes,” 72–73).

47. Obadiah, 95–96/trans. 2.

48. Obadiah, 96/trans. 3, with my changes.

49. Golb defends this reading of the text as *mikrei lailah*, “nocturnal defilements,” rather than Scheiber’s reading of *mi-sarei lailah*, “Lords of Darkness” (“Music,” 43–45; “A Study,” 102–3).

50. Obadiah, 98/trans. 5.

51. Obadiah 96/trans. 3.

52. Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 2:304–5; Wasserstein, “Fatwa.”

53. Golb, “Music,” 43.

54. Obadiah 97/trans. 4.

55. Peter of Cluny, *Letters*, 1:328. Cohen, “Muslim Connection”, 155 n. 43, also points to similar passages in Kritzeck, *Peter*, 262.

56. For the debate on this question, see Golb, “Music.” On the liturgical importance of Joel 2:31, see Büchler, “Obadyah,” 119–27.

57. Idel, “Concepts,” 153–88 at 156. See Wolfson’s idea of “linear circularity” in Jewish thought (*Alef*, 55–117).

58. Rubin, *Time*, 32. The classic statement on time and memory is Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, and see 24–26 in particular. For a more comprehensive historical treatment, see Goldberg, *La Clepsydre*; Stern, *Time and Process*. On time in medieval philosophy, see Rudavsky, *Time Matters*.

59. See Tanhuma, *Lekh Lekha*, 12; Genesis Rabbah 70:6; Nahmanides on Genesis, 12:6 in Moses ben Nahman, *Perushei ha-Torah*, 1:77. On the impact of this concept of typological exegesis, see Funkenstein, “Typological Reading”; Talmage, “Apples,” 109, 141 n. 7; and the correction by Saperstein, “Typological Exegesis.”

60. Funkenstein, *Perceptions*, 120. Chazan, “Timebound,” 24–28, writing in dialogue with Funkenstein, has shown how in some twelfth-century Hebrew narratives such as that chronicling the martyrs of Blois in 1171, “the terrestrial, the historic and the cosmic are made to interpenetrate.” Nevertheless, these foci encompass history only in reference to the past or the cosmic, post-historical future, and represent the details of present events in terms of ritual commemoration rather than in terms of an unfolding cosmic destiny. As Spiegel, “Memory and History,” 152, notes about medieval Jewish historiography, “recent or contemporary occurrences acquired meaning only insofar as they could be subsumed within Biblical categories of events...that is to say, only insofar as they could be transfigured, ritually and liturgically, into repetitions and reenactments of ancient happenings.... History, in the sense that we understand it to consist of unique events unfolding within an irreversible linear time, is absorbed into cyclical, liturgical memory.”

61. Saperstein, “Typological Exegesis,” 160–61. See also Talmage, “Apples,” 109.

62. Cf. Yuval, *Two Nations*, 109–15.

1. Chazan, *Barcelona*, 25.

2. Moses ben Naḥman, *Kitvei Rabbenu*, 1:303; Tostado Martín, *La disputa*, 123, 442; trans. in Moses ben Naḥman, *Writings*, 2:659. Citations here refer to both Chavel's and Tostado Martín's editions.

3. Chazan, "Undermining," is an exception. See also Hames, "Reason"; and my "Polemical Strategy."

4. According to Paris Bibliothèque National de France (BNF), Ms. Lat. 16558, fol. 211b. See Loeb, "La Controverse," 2:252.

5. On Donin, see Grayzel, *Church and Jews*, 1:339–40; Merchavia, *Church*, 229–40; Cohen, *Friars*, 61 n. 19. For a list of Donin's charges, see Rosenthal, "Talmud," 58–76, 145–69.

6. Cohen stresses this accusation to claim that Christians came to view the Talmud as proof of Jewish heresy (*Friars*, 66–76), but Chazan argues that this does not appear in the papal charges made as a result of Donin's initial accusations (*Daggers*, 33, 187 n. 17).

7. Grayzel, *Church and Jews*, 1:238–43.

8. The main sources of information on the controversy are Paris BNF Ms. Lat. 16558, the account by R. Joseph ben Nathan Official (*Vikuah Rabbenu Yehiel mi-Pariz*, contained in Baer, "Disputation"), and the papal and clerical correspondence, mostly contained in Grayzel, *Church and Jews*, vol. 1. See Loeb, "La controverse"; Baer, "Disputation"; Rosenthal, "Talmud"; Merchavia, *Church*, 240–362; Cohen, *Friars*, 60–76; and Chazan, "Hebrew Report."

9. Grayzel, *Church and Jews*, 1:250–53.

10. Martí is also often credited with an Arabic-Latin lexicon known as *Vocabulista in Arabico* (edited by Schiaparelli), on which see Corriente, *El léxico*. This attribution continues to be debated.

11. This work repeats many of the Qur'anic citations of the *Explanatio*, adding references to the *Sira* and *hadith*.

12. March, "Ramon Martí," 454.

13. "As it is given in the authority: 'The day of Judgment came near'" (Qur'ān 54:1) (Hernando, "De Seta," 40).

14. Ms. St. Geneviève 1405, fol. 282r. Cf. *PF*, 750.

15. "Ea quae Mahometus in Alcorano dixit, deum dixisse sibi mediante Gabriele de beata virgine Maria matre Christi" (*PF*, fol. 282r/p. 750).

16. Mérigoux, "L'ouvrage," 68.

17. Peter of Cluny, *Schriften*, 8; *Diálogo*, 103; BNF, Ms. Lat. 1162, fol. 35v, cited in Tolan, *Saracens*, 156.

18. Vose, *Dominicans*, 7, who is responding to arguments Chazan, *Daggers*, 1–38.

19. Vose, *Dominicans*, 93.

20. Tostado Martín, *La disputa*, 293. Cf. Baer, "Disputation," 185–86; Maccoby, *Judaism*, 147.

21. Tostado Martín, *La disputa*, 295–97. Cf. Baer, "Disputation," 186–87; Maccoby, *Judaism*, 148–49.

22. Moses ben Naḥman, *Kitvei*, 1:304; Moses ben Naḥman, *Writings*, 2:660; Tostado Martín, *La disputa*, 124–25, 443. Cf. Chazan, *Daggers*, 77 and note.

23. Moses ben Naḥman, *Kitvei*, 1:308; Moses ben Naḥman, *Writings*, 2:66970; Tostado Martín, *La disputa*, 134–35, 447.

24. Moses ben Naḥman, *Kitvei*, 1:306; Moses ben Naḥman, *Writings*, 2:665, with my changes; Tostado Martín, *La disputa*, 129, 445.

25. Moses ben Naḥman, *Kitvei*, 1:308; Moses ben Naḥman, *Writings*, 2:669; Tostado Martín, *La disputa*, 134, 447.

26. Tostado Martín, *La disputa*, 297. Cf. Baer, “Disputation,” 187; Maccoby, *Judaism*, 149–50.

27. Tostado Martín, *La disputa*, 296. Cf. Baer, “Disputation,” 186; Maccoby, *Judaism*, 149.

28. Shatzmiller, *La deuxième controverse*, 50.

29. Ibid., 50.

30. Ibid., 51.

31. “De Talmud ac reliquis scriptis suis apud eos authentici” (PF, fol. 2v; cf. 2); Ramon Martí, *Capistrum*, 1:54. On the *Capistrum*, see Ragacs, “Mit Zaum,” 24–28, and the lengthy analysis of sources beginning on 29; Cohen, *Living Letters*, 344–58.

32. “Qui apud Hebraeos alicuius auctoritatis sit” (PF, 155v; cf. 543).

33. Ramon Martí, *Capistrum*, 2:30.

34. Ibid., 2:282. On the “fair captive” motif in exegesis, see Lubac, *Exégèse*, première partie, 1:290–304.

35. Hernando, “De Seta Machometi,” 24; Ramon Martí, *Capistrum*, 1:254.

36. Ramon Martí, *Capistrum*, 1:172. This alters the original passage from BT Rosh ha-Shanah 2b. See Ragacs, “Mit Zaum,” 116. On Martí’s citation practices, see my “Translation.”

37. For example, PF, 281r; cf. 749. For a transcription and analysis, see my “Citas árabes.”

38. Ramon Martí, *Capistrum*, 1:54

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39. “Caeterum inducendo auctoritatem textus ubicumque ab ebraico fuerit desumptum, non septuaginta sequar, nec interpretem alium; et quod maioris praesumptionis uidebitur, non ipsum etiam in hoc reverebor Ieronimum, nec tolerabilem Latine linguae uitabo improprietatem, ut eorum quae apud Hebraeos sunt, ex uerbo in uerbum, quotiescumque seruari hoc poterit, transferam veritatem. Per hoc enim Iudaeis falsiloquis lata ualde spaciosaque subterfugiendi praecludetur uia; et minime poterunt dicere, non sic haberi apud eos” (PF, 3r; cf. 4).

40. Ramon Martí, *Capistrum*, 1:56.

41. “Nulla pestis sit efficacior ad nocendum quam familiaris inimicus” (PF, fol. 2v; cf. 2).

42. Grayzel, *Church and Jews*, 2:226, and cf. 2:307 n. 3. As Burns notes, there is no evidence of this being put into effect (*Muslims*, 99). On Llull’s efforts, see Garcias Palou, *El Miramar*; Altaner, “Raimundus Lullus”; Vose, *Dominicans*, 32–33.

43. On his bibliography, see SWRL, 2:1257–304, supplemented with *Obres selectes*, 2, 539–89; and the comprehensive Ramon Llull Database at <http://orbita.bib.ub.es/ramon/index.asp>. On his works in Arabic, see Garcias Palou, *Ramon Llull*.

44. On Llull’s criticism of Martí, see Hillgarth, *Ramon Llull*, 21–22; Lavajo, “Apologetical Method, 158, 174–76; Colomer, “Ramón Llull.”

45. Ramon Llull, *Opera Latina IX*, 268; Lavajo, “Apologetical Method,” 175.

46. Kamar, “Projet,” 126; Lavajo, “Apologetical Method,” at 176.

47. Ramon Llull, *Liber de convenientia*, 4.11:4; Lavajo, “Apologetical Method,” 175. In the *Excusatio Raimundi*, Llull also mentions Aquinas and various others.

48. Kamar, “Projet,” 127; Lavajo, “Apologetical Method,” 176.

49. Hames, *Art*, 9.

50. It is thus puzzling that, as Burman explains, Llull began to use textual authorities for the first time very late in his career in his *Liber praedicationis contra iudaeos* and *Liber de Fine*, both of 1305. Llull suggests in the latter that Christians should “dispute with the Jews...by collecting authorities from the Old Testament in which the New Testament is prefigured, which authorities they should lead back to necessary reasons, because authorities are not contrary to reason when they are true

[*auctoritates non sunt contra rationem ut sunt uerae*]” (*Opera Latina IX*, 259). See Burman, “Influence,” 218; Dahan, *Les intellectuels*, 424.

51. Ramon Llull, *Obres originals*, 5:172. On this passage, see Burman, “Influence,” 217; Johnston, *Spiritual Logic*, 136–37; Cohen, *Friars*, 202–3.

52. “A jurist can know the causes by which a demonstrative or dialectical syllogism is [made], and always should be on the side of the demonstrative and not the dialectical, putting forth natural laws and standards. Opinion, suspicion, comparison, intention, custom, conjecture, bigamy [?], testimony, authority, and the like [*Opinio, suspectio, comparatio, intentio, consuetudo, coniectura, bigamia, testimonium, auctoritas, et sic*], are of the class of positive law, because the intellect cannot object to these apart from belief” (Ramon Llull, *Opera Latina XII*, 296).

53. For an overview of the *Art*, see Bonner, *Art*; Johnston, *Spiritual Logic*, 3–27.

54. *Vita*, 272; *SWRL*, 13. All citations from the *Vita* give the Latin text of Harada followed by A. Bonner’s English translation in *SWRL*. On Llull as a “converted troubadour,” see Zink, *Poésie*, 75–76. As Bonner (13 n. 47) and others have noted, Llull’s “conversion to penance” sounds blatantly Franciscan. (On Llull’s possible Franciscan connection, see *SWRL*, 32 n. 122). On the authorship of the *Vita*, see Harada’s remarks, *Vita*, 261–62.

55. For a summary of the *Vita*, see Hillgarth, *Ramon Llull*, 1–11 and beyond; and the notes of Batllori to the Catalan version, given in Ramon Llull, *Obres essencials*, 1:31–54. Johnston (*Evangelical*, 8) notes that Llull’s *Vita* may have been propaganda for his case at the Council of Vienne; cf. Vega y Esquerri, *Ramón Llull*, 17–134, treating Llull’s *Vita* as a “hermeneutic code” to his works.

56. *Vita*, 272–73; *SWRL*, 1:13–14.

57. *Vita*, 274; *SWRL*, 1:15.

58. *Vita*, 275; *SWRL*, 1:15.

59. *Vita*, 275; *SWRL*, 1:15.

60. *Diálogo*, 8–9; *Dialogue*, 43; *Opusculum*, 113; *CT*, 104, with my changes; *Vita*, 276–77; *SWRL*, 1:16.

61. *Vita*, 302; *SWRL*, 1:45.

62. *Vita*, 280; *SWRL*, 1:22.

63. *Vita*, VIII, 281; *SWRL*, 1:23.

64. See Hames, “Elijah,” 99–102.

65. *Vita*, VIII, 286; *SWRL*, 1:31, with my additions.

66. “Item praeter scripturas canonicas sunt alie scripture a iudeis recepte tanquam autentice, scilicet Thalmud, quod secundum eos scriptura ista non differt a scripturis canonicis.... Similiter dicta doctorum hebraicorum qui glosauerunt vetus testamentum sunt autentica apud eos.... Licet autem huiusmodi scripture in magna parte sint false, scilicet Thalmud et glose doctorum hebraicorum, tamen per eas possumus contra eos efficaciter arguere, ex quo sunt ab eis praedicto modo recepte” (*Biblia*, 4:346). On these passages, see Dahan, *Les intellectuels*, 468; Klepper, *Insight*, 165.

67. Dahan attributes similar ideas to Terreni, including examples from the work *Utrum principalis articulus fidei nostre* (Paris BNF Ms. Lat. 16523, folia 83–86v). See Dahan, *Les Intellectuels*, 442 n. 69 and the cited text on 456.

68. Conde, *La creación*, 268.

CHAPTER 5

1. On Llull’s later impact, see Hillgarth, *Ramon Llull*. On Martí’s later popularity, see Secret, “Le premier emploi.”

2. *Mostrador*, 12r/1:13. Cf. below, n. 60.

3. The only Jewish response to Martí seems to be by Ibn Adret of Barcelona, whose *Perushei Aggadot* presents an imagined polemical dialogue between Christian and Jew. For the text, see Perles, *R. Salomo b. Abraham*, Heb. sec., 24–56. For commentary, see Cohen, “Christian Adversary”; Willi, “Die Perusche”; Chazan, *Daggers*, 137–58. Among the writers to respond to Abner/Alfonso were Joseph ben Shem Tov, Moses ha-Cohen of Tordesillas, Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut, Isaac Pollegar, Moses Narboni, Joseph Shalom, Isaac Albalag, Isaac Israeli, Samuel Ibn Sasson, Hayim ben Yehuda Ibn Musa, Hasdai Crescas, and Judah Leon of Modena, as well as a number of sixteenth-century Italian Kabbalists. On these responses, see Gershenzon, “Study,” 26–32; Sainz de la Maza, “Edición y estudio,” 247–77; *TMH*, 35–49; Sadik, “Critique”; and my “*Testimonial*” 329–50. On Abner/Alfonso’s links with Kabbalism, see *TMH*, 471–80; Sadik, “Is R. Abner.”

4. This tallies with the statement that “more than one-hundred thirty-six years have passed since” the year 4946 (1186) (*Mostrador* 235r/2:207), suggesting that he was still writing the work in 1321–22.

5. Hayoun, “L’épître,” 146. On Narboni’s travels, see Graez, *Geschichte*, 7:450; Munk, *Mélanges*, 504 n. 1. See also Moses Narboni, *The Epistle*, English 53/Hebrew 112, also in BNF Ms. 918, Fonds hébreu, fol. 166b, in English 53/Hebrew 112. These estimates square with the fact that “maestre Alfonso,” a name regularly associated with Abner/Alfonso by himself and others, appears in various acts of the collegiate church of Valladolid, his new residence after conversion, between 1324 (Archives of the Cathedral of Valladolid, legajo 22, #17) and 1341 (legajo 3, #43). Similarly, one finds mention of “Iohan Alfon, fijo de maestre Alfon” in 1348 (legajo 16, #53) (Rucquoi, *Valladolid*, 638 n. 537).

6. On Abner/Alfonso’s bibliography, see Carpenter, “Alfonso,” 140–52.

7. *TMH* contains an edition and translation of the Hebrew text of the *Teshuvot la-Meharef* found in Parma Ms. 2440 (“De Rossi 533”) ff. 8r-65r. Sainz de la Maza, “Edición y estudio,” 542–730, contains an edition and study of Ms. 6423 of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, which includes the Castilian *Respuestas al blasfemo*. The Castilian *Respuestas* has been published as *Těšuvot la-Měharef: Spanische Fassung* (hereafter, *TMS*). *Offering of Zeal* is edited as *Ofrenda de Zelos (Minḥat Kěna’ot) und Libro de la Ley*. Various passages have been translated back into Hebrew in Baer, “*Sefer Minḥat*.” On the *Minḥat*, see also Gershenzon, “View”; Sainz de la Maza, “El converso.” *Book of the Law* is edited in *Ofrenda de Zelos (Minḥat Kěna’ot)*, 87–118. See Diamond, “Trinidad.” His response to the replies to his three letters is found in Parma Ms. 2440, ff 110r-137r, edited by Rosenthal, “Hebrew Writings,” 1:324–67.

8. According to Ambrosio de Morales, who in the sixteenth century examined a copy of the Castilian translation of the now lost *Sefer Milḥamot*, Abner/Alfonso had translated the text into Castilian himself at the behest of Blanca of Portugal, Senora of Las Huelgas of Burgos (Ambrosio de Morales, *Viaje*, 9). Given that Blanca died in 1321, thus overlapping with the composition of the *Teacher* in Hebrew, it seems logical to accept Mettmann’s argument that Abner/Alfonso participated in the production of the Castilian version of that text as well (*Mostrador*, 1:8). See Mettmann, “Littérature didactique,” 26a; Mettmann, *Die volkssprachliche*, 33. Sainz de la Maza, in considering the Vatican Ms. Lat. 6423, argues that there is no concrete evidence with which to adjudicate the question conclusively (“Edición y estudio,” 284).

9. While some of these, including the mathematical treatise *Meyasher akov* (*Strengthening the Curved*) and a single Hebrew poem, are generally accepted as authentic despite slim evidence, others—including the *Libro declarante* (or *Libro de las tres creencias*, *Book of the Three Faiths*), the *Tratado contra las hadas* (*Treatise against Chance*), and the *Sermones contra los judíos y moros* (*Sermons against Moors and Jews*)—have been contested. On these works, see Carpenter, “Alfonso,” 141–42;

and my “Libro” and “Sermones.”

10. On the BNF Ms. Fonds Espagnols 43, the only surviving copy of the *Moreh/ Mostrador*, see Reinhardt and Santiago-Otero, *Biblioteca biblica*, 85–86; Sainz de la Maza, “Edición y estudio,” 208–16, 233.

11. *Mostrador*, 13r/1:15.

12. *Ibid.*, 151v-152r/2:28.

13. For a provisional survey and index of Abner/Alfonso’s sources, see my “*Testimonial*” 351–572, 643–667.

14. Baer, *History*, 1:334.

15. Sainz de la Maza, “*El Toledot Yeshu*,” 800.

16. *Mostrador*, 13r/1:15.

17. *TMH*, 48.

18. Ramon Martí, *Capistrum*, 2:280–81.

19. *Mostrador*, 249r/2:241, 42v/1:71.

20. *Ibid.*, 184r-v/2:98; Ecclesiastes 11:10; BT Ḥagigah 3b; Proverbs 22:17.

21. *TMH*, 8b/339; *TMS*, 41d/11.

22. *Mostrador*, 184r/2:99, with my changes. This statement, “e abrá el coraçon para entender,” makes more sense without the accent, which it lacks in the manuscript, that is, “and let him open his heart to understand.”

23. *Mostrador* 165r/2:57–58.

24. *Ibid.*, 252v/2:251.

25. Ben-Shalom, “Between Official,” 55.

26. *Mostrador*, 40v/1:67.

27. *Ibid.*, 37r/1:61.

28. For example, he states, “Those sages knew that Christ came in their time and they did not receive him out of the gratuitous ill will [la *malquerencia de valle*] that they harbored against him. And, according to what they said, it was because of this gratuitous ill will that they fell into the captivity in which they now are” (*Mostrador*, 202/232v-233r). In contrast with Ramon Martí, Abner/Alfonso emphasizes the freedom of Jews to “correct” the mistakes of their forefathers through belief.

29. *TMH*, 8a/339; *TMS*, 41c/11; *Mostrador*, 41v-42r/1:70. Cf. *TMH*, 12W348; *TMS*, 45b/20.

30. *Mostrador*, 42v/1:71. He also claims he wrote the *Offering of Zeal* “to still the din [*aquedar la varaja*] and noise of those who put themselves out as sages and struggle against God and his Law on this issue” (*Ofrenda*, 40va/76).

31. *Mostrador*, 13r/1:15. As he reiterates, one should “hold in high esteem every man who writes and composes a book on every beneficial subject, even if he should err in some argument, as long as his intention be the service of God and the knowledge of the truth” (34r/1:57).

32. *Ibid.*, 31r/1:49. The Teacher further states, “If the sons take on the bad works of their parents, God will inflict the punishment of the sinning fathers on their sons. If the sons do not...they will not suffer punishment for their fathers.”

33. *Ibid.*, 184v/2:99; 43r/1:35. Cf. Genesis 45:10; Ezekiel 37:25; Proverbs 13:22; BT Shavuot 39a; Sanhedrin 9a, 25b.

34. *Mostrador*, 29r/1:44–45.

35. *Ibid.*, 30r/1:47.

36. *Ibid.*, 30v/1:48. His argument relates to his ideas of predestination and determinism, which are expressed in the amplest terms in the *Minḥat Qena’ot*. See Sirat, *History*, 308–17.

37. We can compare Abner/Alfonso’s list to a similar list given by Nicholas of Lyra in his *Contra Iudaeos* (early 1330s), which lists three reasons why Jews do not convert: their love of goods or fear of poverty, their dislike of Christianity learned

early in life, and their inability to understand Christian thought. See *Biblia*, 4:351v; Hailperin, *Rashi*, 140, 287 n. 37.

38. *Mostrador*, 42v/1:71, emphasis mine. Cf. BT Ḥagigah 13a. Cf. a folio earlier: “Since every contrary Jew holds firm in his arguments with great force, it is necessary to come against him gently [*mansamient*] and remove him from them little by little, as it is fitting for human nature. It is necessary to convince him first of the resolution [of his doubts], then the [textual] *testimonia*, then the [rational] proof [*primero a la soltura, e despues a los testimonios, e despues a la prueba*] and with this he will be completely defeated. This sums up the essence [*rrayz*] of my words in this book” (*Mostrador*, 41r/1:68).

39. In the *Dialogue* of Moses/Petrus Alfonsi, the Christian Peter has many long statements, some well over five hundred words, whereas the Jewish Moses has only one of this length (and this spoken against Islam rather than Christianity). In the *Teacher*, by contrast, the responses of the Rebel can run a few folios in length. Still, they are short compared to those of the Christian Teacher (cf. the Rebel’s longest, §10.24, with the Teacher’s longest, §10.7, well over twenty-five folios).

40. *Mostrador*, 192r/2:115. Cf. also *Mostrador*, 227r/2:191, 307r/2:378.

41. For example, *Mostrador*, 193r/2:119.

42. *Ibid.*, 188v/2:108.

43. *Ibid.*, 34v/1:56.

44. *Ibid.*, 34v/1:56.

45. *Ibid.*, 227r/2:191.

46. *Ibid.*, 35r-v/1:57–58.

47. *Ibid.*, 36r/1:59.

48. *Ibid.*, 235r/2:207. On Abner’s references to Karaism, see Sainz de la Maza, “Caraitas.”

49. *Mostrador*, 42v/1:71.

50. The Jews “say that the Christians are gentiles and servants of idols and the evil kingdom of Edom. And about them was composed the prayer of the heretics, in which they slander Christians five times daily, according to what is ordered in the [talmudic] book *Berakhot*” (*Mostrador*, 300r/2:364). On this, see Langer, *Cursing*, 89–92.

51. *Mostrador*, 342r/2:443.

52. *Ibid.*, 328r-v/2:419.

53. *TMS*, 62vb-63ra/71. On this passage, see Del Valle, “La Contradicción,” 553.

54. *Mostrador*, 12r/1:13.

55. *Ibid.*, 184r/2:98.

56. Solomon Ibn Adret, *She’elot u-Teshuvot*, 271–72, #548.

57. Now lost, but mentioned in the *Mostrador* (12v-13r/1:14–15), passages from this work have been recorded in Latin by Solomon/Pablo and Alonso de Espina (the latter probably drawing from the former). On these fragments, which closely resemble sections of the *Mostrador*, see Del Valle, “El Libro.”

58. Pablo, *Scrutinium*, 525a, copied verbatim by Alonso de Espina, *Fortalitium*, 172rb (3.10).

59. For Eusebius’s text, see Winkelmann’s edition (*Über das Leben* 29–32).

60. *Mostrador*, 12r/1:13.

61. *Ibid.*, 12r/1:13.

62. Cf. “God is the cause and meaning of prophecies and true dreams” (*Ofrenda*, 5ra-5rb/22).

63. *Mostrador*, 12r/1:13.

64. *Ibid.*, 184v/2:98.

65. *Ibid.*, 12r/1:13.

66. Ibid., 12r/1:13.

67. Ibid., 12r-v/1:13.

68. Ibid., 12v/1:13–14.

69. Ibid., 30v/1:48.

70. Sainz de la Maza, “Vi en visión,” 203. Cf. Morrison on Judah/Herman’s dreams (CT, 53).

71. *Mostrador*, 249r/2:241. He claims that Maimonides argued that sleep is associated with a lack of piety (184r/2:98).

72. Ibid., 342v/2:444. In the letter to Abner/Alfonso (the so-called *Response to the Heretic*) that prompted the latter’s *Response to the Blasphemer*, Abner/Alfonso’s rival Isaac Pollegar takes up the language of dreams to insult his former teacher, claiming that he will “eulogize and lament [*espod ve-et’onen*]” for one who sought truth but finally turned “to engage in empty things and dreams” (*TMH*, 1a/327).

73. *Mostrador*, 28r/1:43.

74. *Libro de la ley*, 1v, in *Ofrenda*, 87. Cf. *Mostrador*, 28v/1:43.

75. *Mostrador*, 28v/1:43.

76. Ibid., 28r/1:43.

77. On this notion, see Katz, *Exclusiveness*, 68–69, and see Chapter 3 n. 17. The debate over Abner/Alfonso’s “Jewish” identity continues to be played out in modern scholarship. Baer writes, “Abner’s friends spoke truthfully when they said that he remained a Jew at heart” (*History*, 1:334), but he himself calls him a “malicious informer” (1:354), and Ben-Shalom, “Between Official,” 55 n. 183, seems to agree. Shamir, on the other hand, resists granting Jewish status to Abner/Alfonso, maintaining that he was a “true convert” who “used all means available to destroy Judaism” (*Rabbi Moses*, 53). Cf. Sainz de la Maza, “El converso,” 79; Jaspe, *Filosofiah*, 9; Levinger, “Symposium,” 148.

78. “Hodaat baal din ke-me ah ‘edim dami,” which the Castilian text of the *Teacher* renders as “El otorgamiento del qui es parte del pleito vale tanto como cient testigos” (*Mostrador*, 32v/1:52; cf. 28v/1:44; BT Gittin 40b; Kiddushin 65b; Bava Me’zia 3b). The word for litigation, *pleito*, is the same one he uses in his conversion account when “thinking on this conflict—*pleito*—I went to synagogue to pray” (*Mostrador*, 12r/1:13).

79. Chazan, *Daggers*, 135–36.

80. *Mostrador*, 37r/1:61. Cf. *TMH*, 54v-55r/439; *TMS*, 83va-vb/119.

81. “Every gloss found in the Talmud about anything that was not a commandment is called ‘Haggadah.’...[I]t is [sometimes] fitting to learn from [them] without changing their literal meaning, especially when there are other words that give testimony of the truth of those meanings” (*Mostrador*, 57r/1:101–2; cf. 188v/2:108).

82. Ibid., 293r/2:349. His remarks on the aggadot are found on 38v-39r/1:64–65.

83. He argues, “You do not truly have the Law. It was forgotten by your ancestors and by you, because you do not understand it according to the truth held by men of authentic understanding” (*Mostrador*, 38v/1:64; cf. *TMH*, 7W338; *TMH*, 54r/437).

84. For example, by referring to “this book” in which he is a character as well as the reader who will read his own words (*Mostrador*, 43r/1:71; 163r/1:54; 280r/2:317; 342r/2:444). See Gómez Redondo, *Historia*, 2:1754–55. The *Teacher* constitutes an exception to the “tightly scripted rules” of polemical writing that “consistently suppress the expression of any sense of ambivalence, any complexity about the religiously other” (Burman, *Reading*, 4).

85. *Mostrador*, 42v/1:71.

86. Ibid., 39r/1:65.

87. See also Lazar, “Alfonso,” 1:121–34.

88. *Mostrador*, 42v-43r/1:71.

89. *Ibid.*, 341v/1:443.

90. *Ibid.*, 335v/2:432.

91. According to the introductory table of contents, which summarizes the contents in detail, the original text contained two more paragraphs, which are not actually found in the surviving text of the *Teacher*. In this summary, the Rebel laments, “I gained nothing in all of these disputations which I wrote against them, but I lost [something] in that I ended up on bad terms [me *paré mal*] with all the Jews, and that the Christians will not take me for good” (*Mostrador*, 28r/1:42, 2:445 n. 1105).

92. “Lapidem enim preciosum prudens nequaquam despicit licet inuentus fuerit in drachonis capite, vel bufonis. Mel quoque sputum est apum uel aliquid forsitan aliud minus dignum” (*PF*, 3r; cf. 3).

93. *Mostrador*, 32v/1:52. Cf. Moses ben Maimon, *Eight Chapters*, 6; BT Gittin 40b; Kiddushin 65b; Bava Me’zia 3b. See Jaspe, *Filosofiah*, 19.

94. Perles, *R. Salomo*, Hebrew 42. See above, n. 3.

95. *TMH*, 6b/337.

CHAPTER 6

1. *Mostrador*, 2:203/233r.

2. Zacour, *Jews*, 77. On this *consilium*, see Stalls, “Jewish Conversion to Islam”; Nirenberg, *Communities*, 190–94.

3. Alphonsus Bonihominis, *Die Epistel*, 436. Cf. *PL*, 149:366.

4. Alphonsus Bonihominis, *La Disputa*, 141.

5. Schmidtke and others (*Samaw’al*) have argued that *Samaw’al*’s polemic circulated in Egypt and was read by Jews, thus possibly intersecting with the milieu from which Sa’id Ḥasan emerged (on the circulation, see below, notes 17 and 18). ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s treatise, written in Ceuta at the end of the fourteenth century, exists in four Maghrebi manuscripts. The editor, Esperanza Alfonso, notes the similarity of his arguments with those of both *Samaw’al* al-Maghribī and Sa’id Ḥasan (*Al-Sayf*, 17–18). Anselm/‘Abd Allāh wrote in Tunis a few decades later, and Mikel de Epalza links the text to these earlier polemics (*Tuḥfa*, 69, 72, 98).

6. Morrison, *Understanding*, 5–6. For a critique, see Tolan, review of *Understanding*.

7. Other words for conversion include *intaqala*, literally “to emigrate” or “move over” *ihtada*, “to be rightly guided”; and *dakhala fī al-dīn*, “to enter into the religion.” In Arabic Christian sources, *raja’a*, literally “to return,” is often used as a calque directly from the Greek word *epistrephō*, relating to the biblical *shuv*. More abundant are the terms dealing with apostasy and turning to other, non-Muslim religions. For example, *milla* indicates “a sect or [non-Muslim] creed,” and thus *tamalla* and the related form *imtalla* both can mean “to embrace a non-Muslim sect.” (Also, in modern Standard Arabic, *i’ tanaqa* means “to embrace” a thing, idea, or belief.) *Tahawwada* (or, in some Judeo-Arabic sources, *tawahhada*) is “to become Jewish” in particular, and *tanaṣṣara*, “to become Christian.” Apostasy from Islam is *ridda* (usually from Islam to unbelief) or *irtidād* (to a non-Islamic religion), and an apostate is a *murtadd*. *Alḥada* or *ilṭaḥada* means “to deviate from the right path,” “apostatize to irreligion,” or “be a heretic.” Thus heresy of various kinds was often *ilḥād* or *zandaqa*. *Shirk* is “polytheism,” to not believe or deny religion is *kafara*, and *takfīr* is the accusation of being an unbeliever, apostate, or atheist. In some Iberian sources, a distinction is made between converts from various backgrounds

(*musālima*, *asālimah*, *mawālī*, *muwalladūn*, etc.), on which see Fierro, “*Mawār*” Aillet, *Les Mozarabes*, 106–13; Zоргati, *Pluralism*, 23–25. On Judeo-Arabic terminology, see above, Chapter 3 n. 17. I am grateful to Sarah Stroumsa for her help sorting out these terms.

8. Bulliet, *Conversion*, 42. For a critique of Bulliet’s theory, see Morony, “Age”; Zоргati, *Pluralism*, 26–31.

9. Bulliet, “Conversion Stories,” 132. See also García-Arenal, “Conversion,” 587.

10. DeWeese, *Islamization*, 23.

11. See Renard, *Friends*, 43–83.

12. Bulliet, “Conversion Stories,” 132.

13. Wasserstein, “Islamisation,” 51. See also Aillet, *Les Mozarabes*, 95–106 on the evolution of conversion’s meaning in Al-Andalus.

14. DeWeese, *Islamization*, 26, emphasis in original; and see the overview on 17–27.

15. Jones, “Dreams,” 109.

16. *Ifḥām*, Arabic 121/English 89 with my changes.

17. In their recent edition of the early recension of *Silencing*, the editors Mazarka et al. suggest that the earlier version (the shorter polemic without the conversion narrative) was better known farther east (as testified by manuscripts from Persia even as late as the seventeenth century), while the later version (the longer polemic with the narrative) was known principally farther west (as testified by manuscripts from Jaffa, Cairo, and Damascus) (*Samaw’al*, 14).

18. On the reception of *Silencing*, see *Ifḥām*, 24–25, which also includes the heretic’s response and Samaw’al’s riposte on Arabic 121–25/English 88–93. See also Chiesa and Schmidtke, “Jewish Reception,” 329–30, who consider a Genizah copy of parts of *Silencing* in Hebrew characters that includes fragments from the later recension without the conversion narrative but also includes new text not found elsewhere.

19. *Ifḥām*, Arabic 94/English 75.

20. *Ibid.*, Arabic 117–18/English 86.

21. *Ibid.*, Arabic 95/English 75.

22. *Ibid.*, Arabic 32/English 46.

23. *Ibid.*, Arabic 98–99/English 76–77.

24. For Ibn Sinīnā’s autobiography, see Ibn Sinā, *Life*, 24; Gutas, *Avicenna*, 27. Al-Baghdādī’s text is recorded in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a, *Uyūn al-anbā*, and translated in *Self*, 159.

25. *Ifḥām*, Arabic 100–101/English 77–78.

26. *Ibid.*, Arabic 103/English 79.

27. *Ibid.*, Arabic 105/English 80.

28. *Ibid.*, Arabic 12–15/English 36–38.

29. See *Self*, 93. Similarly, Jones, “Dreams,” 111, sees dreams in both Muslim and Christian sources as “a locus of power in the process of conversion” that “reify the authority, spiritual power and sincerity of the visionary” (*Self*, 130). For a reading of medieval Islamic dreams as “personal reports that express individual personalities, their development, and self-awareness,” see Kahana-Smilansky, “Self-Reflection,” 99–100; Davis and Rambo, “Conversion.”

30. *Ifḥām*, Arabic 109–10/English 82.

31. *Ibid.*, Arabic 111–13/English 83–84.

32. *Ibid.*, Arabic 114–15/English 85.

33. *Ibid.*, Arabic 118/English 87.

34. *Ibid.*, Arabic 119–20/English 87–88.

35. *Ibid.*, Arabic 103/English 79.

36. *Ibid.*, Arabic 94/English 75. On his father’s love, see Arabic 106/English 81.

37. Ṣaḥīḥ *al-Bukhārī*, 9.87.122 (cf. 123–26) records, “Narrated Abu Huraira: I heard the Prophet saying, ‘Whoever sees me in a dream will see me in his wakefulness, and Satan cannot imitate me in shape.’” On this tradition, see Lory, *La rêve*, 32, 117–18.

38. *Iḥḥām*, Arabic 107/English 81.

39. *Ibid.*, Arabic 114/English 85.

40. *Ibid.*, Arabic 108/English 82.

41. *Ibid.*, Arabic 34–35/English 47.

42. García-Arenal, “Autobiographies,” 97. See also *Self*, 45–47.

43. Stroumsa, “Jewish Intellectual,” 194.

44. Husain, “Converting,” 13–17.

45. *Iḥḥām*, Arabic 93/English 74.

46. Stroumsa, “Jewish Intellectual,” discusses many of these figures. On Ibn Killis, see Cohen and Somekh, “Court.” Samaw’al himself was a disciple of al-Baghdādī. On Jewish conversion to Islam in and around al-Andalus, see García-Arenal, “Jewish Converts”; García-Arenal, “Rapports.”

47. Maimonides addresses apostasy in his *Epistle to Yemen* (*Iggeret Teman*), *Epistle on Forced Conversion/Epistle on Martyrdom* (*Iggeret ha-Shemad*), and in various legal *responsa* (See *Igrot*). On Maimonides’ own possible conversion, see Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 116–24.

48. Sa’id Ḥasan’s text, contained in Yale Beinecke Landberg Ms. 700, previously discussed by Goldziher, “Sa’id b. Hasan,” was edited by Weston, “*Kitāb Masālik*.” It has been republished in a faulty reprinting as *Masālik al-Naẓar fī Nubūwat Sayyid al-Bashar*. On ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī’s text, see Perlmann, “‘Abd al-Ḥaqq”; and the critical edition by Alfonso.

49. Weston, “*Kitāb Masālik*,” 353/379.

50. *Ibid.*, 353–54/379–80.

51. *Iḥḥām* Arabic 110/English 83; Weston, “*Kitāb Masālik*,” 354/380.

52. Weston, “*Kitāb Masālik*,” 354–55/380.

53. *Ibid.*, 353/379. Cf. the comparative Jewish notion (BT Berakhot 57b), in which dreams represent “one sixtieth” part prophecy.

54. Weston, “*Kitāb Masālik*,” 357–58/382–83.

55. *Ibid.*, 357/382.

56. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī, *Al-Sayf al-mamdūd*, Arabic 9.

57. *Ibid.*, Arabic 10.

58. *Ibid.*, Arabic 10–11.

59. *Ibid.*, Arabic 11–12.

60. *Ibid.*, Arabic 10.

61. *Ibid.*, Arabic 11.

62. *Ibid.*, Arabic 12–14.

63. Bourdieu, “Algerian,” 59. Similarly, Gardet argues that prophecy in Islam is “neither progressive history nor cyclical history” (“Moslem,” 209). On the Muslim concept of *Heilsgeschichte*, see Schimmel, *Deciphering*, 66–76; Weintritt, “Interpretations,” 89. On the interaction of Muslim *Heilsgeschichte* with philosophical notions of time, see Goodman, “Time.”

64. *Tuḥfa*.

65. *Tuḥfa*, 203/Self 196.

66. *Tuḥfa*, 205–7/Self 196.

67. *Tuḥfa* 205/Self 196.

68. *Tuḥfa*, 209–11/Self 197. In his edition, Epalza takes *aḥkām*, “principles” or “regulations,” as referring to the *Sententiae* of Peter Lombard (*Tuḥfa*, 210). Reynolds translates *uṣūl* and *aḥkām* as “principles” and “details,” respectively (*Self*, 197).

69. *Tuḥfa*, 211/Self 197.

70. Martello's identity is uncertain. See Epalza, "Nuevas aportaciones," 123–36.

71. *Tuhfa*, 215–19/Self 198.

72. *Tuhfa*, 48–50; Samsó, "Turmediana." On early modern Ottoman narratives of conversion to Islam, see Krstić, *Contested Conversions*, 98–120.

73. Beier, "Una coincidència," 83–88. The texts that overlap are the opening of the *Gift* (*Tuhfa*, 193) and the "Speech of the Quraishi" found in Ikhwān al-Safā', *Case*, Arabic 152–53/English 210–14.

74. *Tuhfa*, 195

75. *Ibid.*, 197.

76. *Ibid.*, 227.

77. *Ibid.*, 231.

78. *Ibid.*, 237. Juan's narrative, dated 1360, also bears comparison to Abner/Alfonso's conversion story: as two fourteenth-century narratives of conversion to Christianity written in Hebrew, they share many similar tropes and images, including a dream vision based on the model of a prophetic calling that serves to authorize the convert to write. For the text and translation of Juan's narrative, see the appendix to Cohen-Hanegbi, "Transmitting Medicine." I am grateful to Dr. Cohen-Hanegbi for sharing an advance copy of her work with me.

79. *Tuhfa*, 483. On the question of Anselm/'Abd Allāh as a "Renaissance" or "humanist" thinker, see my "Original," 159 n. 29.

80. These include the *Book of Good Counsel* (*Llibre de bons amonestaments*, ca. 1396–98), the *Verses on the Division of the Kingdom of Mallorca* (*Cobles de la divisió del regne de Mallorques*, 1398), a series of at least four short, rhymed *Prophecies* (ca. 1405 and after), and, most important, his *Dispute of the Ass* (*Disputa de l'ase*, ca. 1417–18). See Epalza's summary in the *Tuhfa*, 11–25; Riquer, *Història*, 2:265–308; Beier, *Anselm*, 56–123.

81. *Tuhfa*, 219–21/Self 198–99.

82. *Tuhfa*, 221/Self 199.

83. For Anselm/'Abd Allāh's pledge of secrecy to Martello, see *Tuhfa*, 222/Self, 199. For the story of his deception of the Christian friar and merchants, see *Tuhfa*, 239–41. This anecdote can be read in the light of two important archival letters from King Alfonso V (Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó R. 2672 f. CXr and R. 2691 f. 138v). The first is to the Tunisian prince, ending with a brief greeting to Anselm "en altra manera appellat Alcayt Abdalla." The second (dated 1423) is directly to the latter, offering him safe passage to return as a Christian (Calvet, *Fray Anselmo*, 52–53 and 40–41, respectively).

84. His works only mention in passing, "Est de nation cathalaïne, et nay de la cité de mallorques...et est official en la doyne de Thunicz" (*Dispute*, 48) and that he is "en altre manera appellat Abdal·là" (*Obres Menors*, 144, although see *Llibre de bons amonestaments*, ed. Ripoll, 77–91, concerning the lack of his Arabic name in some of the manuscripts). One of his prophecies specifies, "Aquest dit/fou scrit...jus en Tunis/Barboria per mi/Abdala/sense falla" (Bohigas, "Profecies," 181).

85. For example, in his *Llibre*, he shows belief in the Trinity and Catholic Church (*Obres menors*, 144–45). In the *Cobles*, he states that God sent his son "to die for us" (*Obres minors*, 134). Most significantly, in the *Disputa de l'Ase*, the character of Anselm wins the debate against the Ass by citing the Gospel of John 1:14 and St. Augustine, concluding, "Omnipotent God wanted to take on human flesh, mixing his high divinity with our humanity, making himself man" (*Dispute*, 138).

86. See my "Original," 164 n. 42, 167–68; Alvarez, "Beastly," 182.

87. *Obres menors*, 121, 128–29.

88. Samsó, "Turmediana," 79. Rather than judging Anselm/'Abd Allāh in mutually exclusive psychological terms, the fragmentary fate of his works demands that both author and text be understood, in Beier's term, as "inter-cultural" (*Anselm*,

160–62), in which the two sides of his authorial identity become essential and mutually necessary elements of his textual voice.

89. *Dispute*, 76.

90. *Tuhfa*, 27–29, 227/*Self*, 200.

91. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Islāmī, *Al-Sayf al-mamdūd*, Arabic 8.

92. Krstić, *Contested Conversions*, 103.

93. *Ifḥām*, Arabic 124/English 92.

CONCLUSION

1. Edition found in Lara Olmo, “Edición.” For a recent analysis, see my “Converting.”

2. This follows Hawkins, *Archetypes*, 13–28.

3. Lipton notes: “Just as Jews are regarded as potential Christians in the myriad texts and roundels imagining or forecasting their conversion, so Christians are represented as equally—or rather more—liable to evolve (or devolve) into ‘Jews.’ Fluidity between Judaism and Christianity is thus simultaneously courted (in calls for conversion) and repudiated (in condemnations of ‘Judaizing’), acknowledged and denied” (*Images*, 29).

4. Ricoeur, *Time*, 3:247.

5. Alter, *Art*, 62.

6. This corresponds to what Pomian, *L’Ordre du temps*, 39–40, calls a religious “chronoscopy.”

7. Ansary. *Destiny*, 350. Similarly, Robert Bellah has observed more generally, “Narrative actually constitutes the self.... [W]e understand our membership in groups to the extent that we understand the story that defines the group” (*Religion*, 279).

8. On the notion of Islam in medieval Jewish historical thought, see Stroumsa, “Islam.”

9. I borrow the term *shorthand* from Whitenack, “Conversion,” 17.

10. Fredriksen, “Paul,” 34.

11. Cf. Morrison, *Understanding*, 53–54, 89–90.

12. Linda Jones notes that Muslim conversion accounts, written in order to display God’s many blessings, tend to emphasize the convert’s own spiritual strength and piety, while Christian narratives, written in a “confessional mode,” tend to “underscore...sinfulness and spiritual immaturity” (“Dreams,” 130).

13. As Baden notes, “Das wesentliche Kriterium der Bekehrung des Schriftstellers ist also dieses: daß sich der Stil hinfort der spirituellen Erfahrung gewachsen zeigt” (*Literatur*, 68).

14. Harpham, *Ascetic*, 100. Cf. Harpham, “Conversion,” 45.

15. Certeau has stated that the writing of history, personal or public, relies on a firm rupture with the past, “a division between the body of knowledge that utters a discourse and the mute body that nourishes it.... [B]reakage is therefore the postulate of interpretation...and its object” (*Writing*, 4). Fernández links this notion of rupture with the construction of authority: “The epistemological problem inherent in autobiography—how to narrate from the inside—leads many autobiographers to strategies like that of the conversion narrative.... [C]onversion is a death of sorts, which breaks the fetters and raises the convert out of life, to a higher plane from which to narrate, and thus allows closure.... [A]utobiography, through apostrophe, often functions as an elaborate staging of the appeal to that outside, absolute authority” (*Apology*, 31) See the similar remarks of Freccero, *Dante*, 264–65.

16. Bynum, *Metamorphosis*, 30. On conversion and hybridity, see Zorgati,

Pluralism, 171–78.

17. It is due to what Paul Ricoeur calls the “aporetics of temporality” that narration functions not as a final and “totalized” representation of time in which lived time and cosmic time are finally reconciled with each other, but also as a way of creating a “third time” that “preserves the impetus” of a totalized representation of time “without giving in to the temptation of a completed totality” (*Time*, 3:103).

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